

# Estonian e-Tiger Leaping to Georgia: Added Value of Estonian Development Cooperation

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Estonia became a donor of development assistance in 1998 as it was in the process of joining the EU. Since the early days of being a donor, the Estonian approach has been to share its transition experience with other countries that share a similar past with the country. This thesis explores why and how Estonia aspires to offer added value with its development cooperation through sharing its transition experience and to what is the impact of its assistance. More precisely, this thesis takes a qualitative project level look at the added value of Estonian development cooperation by examining how Estonia shared its experience of computerising schools with the Republic of Georgia through the educational reform titled Deer Leap. Conceptualising sharing transition experience as a tool for democratisation, and thereby development, it argues that the unique added value that Estonia offers to developing countries is the "transition experience" itself, because there is personal expertise gathered from implementing the very same reforms in Estonia. Also, Estonia the partner countries see Estonia as role model in moving towards the EU. These conclusions are helpful for understanding whether at all and to what extent a small donor like Estonia can support positive developments and democratisation in partner countries.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords

transition experience, democratisation, added value, ICT in education, Tiger Leap, Deer Leap, Estonia, Republic of Georgia

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## List of abbreviations

DLF	Deer Leap Foundation
EaP	EU Eastern Partnership
eGA	e-Governance Academy
EMFA	Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
EU	European Union
EU-12	12 countries that joined the EU between 2004-2007 (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Romania)
ESIDA	Educational and Scientific Infrastructure Development Agency
GDP	gross domestic product
GNI	gross national income
ICT	information and communications technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSF	Open Society Foundation
TLF	Tiger Leap Foundation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

*“It's not the Tech, it's all about the Teach.” - Ewan McIntosh*

# **I Introduction**

## **1.1. Problem statement**

Development is a complex process with several stakeholders and nuances. In fact, the concept is so puzzling that there is less and less agreement about what “development” even means, what are the principles it is supposed to entail and the values it ought to carry. However, there seems to be increasingly more support to the idea that whatever the exact measure of development might be for anyone, the common notion is that those who have can share their material and immaterial resources with the have-nots to reach a better future. Estonia as a young development donor has decided that the most valuable resource it has to offer to other countries is its own experience of social transitions during the past 20 odd years.

After restoring independence from the Soviet Union, Estonia has gone through enormous reforms in nearly all sectors, including tax policy, health care, education, judicial system and many more. Some of these reforms have been more successful than others, but based on the fact that the country has now joined the European Union (EU) and is an active member of other international organisations, it is clear that in general the developments have improved the country and taken it from the have-nots category to the haves category. By moving from an aid-recipient country to a donor of development assistance in the late 1990s, Estonia had to formulate its identity and guiding principles as a donor country. One of the foundations of the new identity is exactly the personal experience of transition over the past decades. My thesis will explore why and how such a policy choice has been made, and more importantly, what has been the impact of it.

More precisely, this thesis takes a qualitative project level look at the added value of Estonian development cooperation by examining how Estonia shared its experience of computerising all schools with the Republic of Georgia. The educational reform programme titled Deer Leap was implemented by transferring Estonia’s know-

how of its own transition process with incorporating ICT into education to Georgia. The programme was managed by the Georgian government and implemented in partnership with the e-Governance Academy (eGA), which at the time was the biggest Estonian non-governmental non-profit development organisation. My analysis is based on the empirical data of the people who participated in the programme as well as some secondary data from the programme documents.

What is more, since the Estonian economy is very small compared to its European counterparts, and since Estonian living conditions for many people are much below the EU average, it has been quite a challenge for the government to gain public and political support for the development policy. There is a strong demand for proving that Estonian tax-payers' money is spent towards the achievement of the proclaimed development goals. Currently, the Estonian government does not produce any qualitative evaluation of the impact of its development cooperation policy or the projects it finances. Therefore, one of the underlying reasons I have chosen to focus my thesis on the analysis of the impact of Estonian assistance is to indicate whether the scepticism towards development cooperation has any legitimate grounds.

## **1.2. Research questions**

Expressly, my thesis will explain why and how Estonia aspires to offer added value with its development cooperation through sharing its positive transition experiences, and what is the actual impact of its assistance. My aim is to answer the following questions in the conclusion of my thesis:

- 1) What does sharing transition experience mean in the Estonian development cooperation?
- 2) How effectively is Estonia sharing its transition experience?
- 3) What is the actual added value and impact of Estonia assistance to its partner countries?

The answers to these questions will help to understand how Estonia as a young and small donor can participate in and achieve results from activities within the global development framework. My work should reveal what is the impact of Estonian

development cooperation on the development of partner countries, and whether there are unintended consequences for the donor country itself.

These questions will be answered by examining the case of cooperating with Georgia in the framework of the educational sector by transferring the Estonian experience of school computerisation to Georgia, and inductively making conclusions about Estonia as a donor in general. I will not attempt to present a comprehensive evaluation of the educational reform in Georgia as that would require studying more variables that could fit in one Master's thesis. Rather, I will focus on assessing the effectiveness and added value of the Estonian contribution to that reform.

My thesis will use the Deer Leap programme as a case study to analyse the impact of Estonian aid for two main reasons. First, Georgia is named as one of the priority partners in the national development cooperation plan, which means that activities there are aligned with the Estonian strategic interests. Second, it has been among the top recipients of Estonian aid throughout the years, which means that Estonia sees Georgia as a serious long-term partner rather than an *ad hoc* associate. The selected ICT project lasted for several years, which has not been common for most Estonian bilateral projects that tend to be short-term. Third, Estonia and Georgia share a relatively similar past in relation to the Soviet Union, which makes it interesting to see whether a meaningful transfer of transition experiences can take place between countries that started from a relatively similar point at the beginning of 1990s, but developed at different paces.

It is important that Deer Leap in Georgia is a nation-wide programme, and this means that the results of my research will help to understand whether at all and to what extent a small donor like Estonia can support positive extensive developments in partner countries. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the use of ICT in education is merely a drop in the sea of educational reform and that expecting this research to make conclusions about the large-scale impact of Estonian assistance on Georgian educational system could be too ambitious. Instead, the thesis will look at a specific case study to inductively suggest how the Estonian taxpayers' money is spent for the declared goals of supporting human development, improving the quality and access to education, and thereby enhancing democracy. My aim is not to make overarching conclusion about the whole Estonian development cooperation, but to understand the role and meaning of the

activities through the experiences of the participants and stakeholders of the programme.

### **1.3. Estonia as a donor country**

Like a number of other Central and Eastern European countries, Estonia started an independent foreign policy after restoring its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. During the first decade of re-independence, Estonia was itself a recipient of foreign aid and focused its actions on consolidating its statehood (Kasekamp, 2010, Ch. 8). It was not until Estonia started its accession process to the EU that it became a donor of development assistance. The first time the Estonian parliament allocated funds from the state budget for such purposes was in 1998 for the mission of helping to mitigate the effects of floods in Poland and the Czech Republic, for various project with Ukraine and Russia, and as donations to United Nations' (UN) agencies (EMFA, 2014b). In order to succeed in the accession negotiations, the government used all available means to demonstrate that Estonia was not only a recipient of assistance, but that it was now also providing support to other struggling countries. Establishing a development cooperation programme was one concrete way how Estonia shifted its focus of attention from primarily protecting its sovereignty to portraying itself as an inherent part of the European community (Andrespok and Kasekamp, 2012, 119).

A testament to the institutionalisation of development policy is the Development Plan of Estonian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid 2006-2010, which was adopted by the government in 2006, after long discussions with a number of stakeholders. The Development Plan listed six priority sectors of Estonia's development assistance and identified four priority partner countries for bilateral aid. The most important topics for Estonia were enhancing human development; guaranteeing peace, democracy and human rights; supporting economic development through market liberalisation efforts; encouraging environmentally sustainable behaviour; improving aid effectiveness by focusing bilateral aid on a few priority partners (Afghanistan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine); and increasing public awareness of and support to development cooperation (EMFA, 2006). The Development Plan has now been updated with a follow-up plan for 2011-2015, which makes minor changes to the priority sectors, adds Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus (thus including all of the six EU Eastern



Partnership (EaP) countries) to the priority partners' list, and attempts to bring policy coherence with the EaP that was established in 2009.

In terms of funding for development, Estonia along with the rest of the newer EU member states has committed to spend 0.33 percent of its gross national income (GNI) on official development assistance (ODA) by 2015 in accordance with the EU Council of Ministers' decision from 25 May 2005. The Estonian Development Plan for 2006-2010 set out that by 2010, Estonia would spend 0.17 percent of its GNI on development assistance, but the government reduced this goal during the global economic crises to 0.10 percent by 2010, still keeping the final goal of 0.33 percent by 2015. The Estonian plan for 2011-2015 is less ambitious and promises to reach the minimum goal of 0.17 percent by 2015, while eventually aiming for 0.33 percent as internationally agreed (EMFA, 2010). In 2013, the actual level of spending was 0.13 percent and, unless the political will to increase the funding will get significantly stronger, it is more and more unlikely that the goal of 0.17 percent will be achieved on schedule.

Since Estonia became a donor of development assistance, it has contributed nearly 113 million euros to bi- and multilateral development cooperation and humanitarian aid interventions. Majority of Estonian funds are channelled through multilateral institutions (mainly the EU). The bilateral funding to achieve the goal of eradicating global poverty and attaining the Millennium Development Goals via development cooperation has been spent on the following measures:

- Supporting human development – 5.3 million euros
- Supporting peace, human rights and democracy – 8.5 million euros
- Supporting economic development – 1.4 million euros
- Supporting sustainable development – 4.6 million euros
- Enhancing of the implementation of developing cooperation – 5.5 million euros
- Informing the public and global education – 1.7 million euros

This distribution clearly indicates that the thematic priority of supporting peace, human rights and democracy in developing countries by sharing expertise and supporting various thematic initiatives in partner countries has been the most preferred sector for development actors in Estonia. A third of all bilateral development funding since 2011 has been allocated for achieving this aim. The activities deal with topics such as promoting peace and stability, building democracy and establishing practices of good

governance. Since 2011, the biggest aid recipients in the sector were Afghanistan (2.3 million euros), Moldova (691 000 euros), Georgia (398 000 euros), Tunisia (210 000 euros), Ukraine (161 000 euros), Kyrgyz Republic (116 000 euros) and Armenia (100 000 euros). (EMFA, 2014a) Between the years 2006 and 2010, which is when the project studied in my thesis took place, most of the assistance went to Georgia, which received an average of 17 percent of all bilateral ODA (Arengukoostöö Ümarlaud, 2012, 8).

While most of Estonia's cooperation projects have been short-term, there are also some longer-term ones. Some of the best known are the projects dedicated to sharing Estonia's experiences of using ICT in education with the partners in developing countries. On the one hand, improving access to education and its quality in developing countries is the very first goal in the Estonian development cooperation plan. On the other hand, the thematic goal of supporting peace, human rights and democracy in partner countries has received the most bilateral aid funds. Under this goal, Estonia has primarily focused on helping to advance democracy and good governance in partner countries, which are considered to be pre-requisites of sustainable development (EMFA, 2006, 16). The Development Plan for 2010-2015 declares that ICT is a horizontal issue that will be promoted under all thematic priorities of Estonian development cooperation. It is even emphasized that enhancing "the availability and application of IT for the benefit of democracy is indispensable from the point of view of today's development" (EMFA, 2006, 16). Considering that Estonia has undertaken to give assistance in areas where it has a concrete added value to offer based on its own successful transition experiences, it will be intriguing to find out how good the Estonian know-how of using ICT in education actually is and how successfully it has been in exporting the know-how to other countries.

#### **1.4. Background of the case study**

Since regaining its independence from the Soviet Union nearly a quarter of a century ago, Estonia has made vast progress in the ICT sector. In the early 1990s, Estonia similarly to all other post-Soviet states was making efforts to create a viable, modern and competitive state. Naturally, education is an important building block in such an effort. In 1996 when Estonia was implementing a comprehensive educational reform, the Estonian ambassador to the United States at the time Toomas Hendrik Ilves

and the Minister of Education Jaak Aaviksoo began a discussion about the ways ICT could alter not just the Estonians' way of living, but also the whole educational paradigm. The discussion concluded that a large-scale program is needed to equip the schools and teachers with modern tools for teaching and learning. Inspired by the economic tigers in Asia, the program was named Tiger Leap (TLF, 2011). Officially, the Tiger Leap was launched on national television by President Lennart Meri on 21 February 1996 as a part of the on-going educational reform.

There was no explicit strategy written for achieving a wider social impact through introducing ICT into general education, but due to the strong political support a semi-independent legal body of Tiger Leap Foundation (TLF) was founded by the Ministry of Education exactly one year after the programme was announced. The new foundation became the central coordinating body for computerising the schools and its objectives were (Laanpere, 2005b, 67):

- Supporting local municipalities in developing modern ICT infrastructure (computer hardware and Internet connections) in schools;
- Training the teachers for basic computer literacy and applying ICT in their work;
- Supporting school-level curriculum development and educational innovations by introducing new, ICT-based teaching methods and learning environments;
- Purchasing, translating and developing original educational software matching the requirements of new national curricula for comprehensive schools.

The TLF was funded mainly by the state and local municipalities. Between the years 1997-2000, the programme was granted approximately 12 million US dollars from the state budget, 3 million from the EU's Phare programme, 6 million from local municipalities, and a small amount of 0.15 million from the private sector (grand total of 21.15 million US dollars). With these resources, the programme achieved the following results (Laanpere, 2005b, 67):

- computers and Internet connection available in all schools (on average 25 students per computer);
- 65% of all teachers trained for acquiring basic computer skills;
- 61 educational software packages purchased (some for pilot schools only, most for all secondary schools in Estonia);
- 39 original educational software packages produced and distributed to all schools;

- the Teachers NetGate multifunctional educational portal launched.

In addition the quantifiable results, the programme had brought about several social impacts like making the schools more open, creating Internet access points for the broader communities, and contributing to the spread of personal computers at homes. These results were believed to be possible thanks to fact that the TLF was state-owned, but still independently managed, but also because all stakeholders in the schools, municipalities and the government were motivated to contribute both financially and in terms of human resources in order to meaningfully innovate schools so that the students could not only learn *from* the computers but *with* them. (Laanpere, 2005a).

Successful communication campaign in the media, influential imagery, effective management, generous funding form the national budget and municipalities built a strong support for the program (Toots & Laanpere, 2004, 8). The Tiger Leap programme reinforced the Estonian self-image of a modern and aspiring state (eGA, 2007). Indeed, the fast developments of the Tiger Leap are impressive. According to the first ever professional study looking at ICT in education titled “Tiger in Focus”, the educational ICT infrastructure, services and software as well as the competencies of students were still below satisfactory level in 2000 (Toots & Laanpere, 2004, 16). Already by 2004, every school in Estonia had computers, access to Internet and the majority of people in the educational system had basic computer literacy (Toots et al., 2004, 72). Once the successes of the program became evident, the program quickly became one of the ‘selling items’ for potential partner countries. This enabled Estonia to portray itself as a progressive and modern European state as well as find a niche for itself on the development cooperation playing field.

The Tiger Leap Programme lasted until 2000 and developed into the Tiger Leap Plus Programme that lasted from 2001 to 2005 and later into the Learning Tiger during the period of 2006 to 2009. Its initial focus was more on computers and Internet connections, but moved gradually towards teacher training, electronic educational materials and international cooperation. Today Tiger Leap is a programme managed by the Innovation Centre for Digital Education, which operates under the Information Technology Foundation for Education (HITSA).

While the TLF implemented the activities in Estonia, another foundation called the e-Governance Academy was established in 2002 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Open Society Foundation (OSF) and the

government of Estonia with the mission to enhance the ideas of e-governance and e-democracy at home and abroad via training, consultancy and research activities. While its mission was e-governance at large, the success of the Tiger Leap programme immediately made ICT in education one of the most important “export items” for eGA. To date, the organisation has shared the Estonian experiences of incorporating ICT into education with Albania, Georgia, Macedonia and Moldova, but only the projects in Georgia and Moldova have been financially supported by the Estonian MFA (the others by World Bank).

A quick look at the statistics further proves that Estonia was in a good position to share experiences with Georgia. In Estonia, there were 483 personal computers per 1000 inhabitants in 2005 compared with 42 personal computers in Georgia in 2004. Also, Estonia had 513 Internet users per 1000 inhabitants in 2005 while the same figure in Georgia was 39 in 2004. Estonian figures at the time were comparable to well developed countries like Finland and Georgia was acutely lagging behind. (Gylfason and Hochreiter, 2009). However, it must be noted that Estonia was in a much better state when it started Tiger Leap compared to Georgia in 2004. In Estonia, many schools already had some experience with computers from the late 1980s/early 1990s whereas Georgian schools had practically no experience with this. Also, the general level of development in Estonia had been higher when Tiger Leap started, because in Georgia not only did the schools lack ICT but their general infrastructure was much worse (see more in Chapter 5.5.). Nevertheless, a historic opportunity presented itself and the cooperation between the two countries started forcefully.

The know-how transfer projects of eGA were mostly funded by the Estonian MFA, but other donors also contributed (UNESCO, UNDP, OSF). Infrastructure development was supported by other donors and in the case of Deer Leap the funding primarily came straight from the Georgian national budget. Estonian funding for eGA’s cooperation with Deer Leap was allocated through two separate projects (EMFA, 2014a):

- 1) Project No. 2005/6 from March-April 2005
  - Estonian MFA contribution: 20 400 USD
  - Other contributions (OSF Estonia, Estonian Ministry of Education and others): 36 000 USD
- 2) Project No. 2006/26 from January 2007 to December 2008

- Estonian MFA contribution: 162 600 USD
- Other contributions (Government of Georgia, UNESCO; UNDP, Open Society Institute and others)

### **1.5. Estonian logic of sharing transition experience**

There was no formal national strategy for development cooperation as a foreign policy sector in Estonia when the school computerisation development cooperation project started in Georgia, and the debate on this question was yet to emerge (Kuusik, 2006, 51). Until 2006, the development cooperation actions were quite *ad hoc* and Estonia was still searching for its niche among other donors. At the same time, thanks to the lack of a colonial past and previous experience with development aid, Estonia had the opportunity to conceptualise its role in a completely new way. Riina Kuusik proposed in the Estonian Foreign Policy Yearbook 2006 that as it was a recent aid recipient itself, one could expect Estonia “to be particularly sensitive to donor objectives, and approach its policy formulation and implementation as a long-term process of self-development” (Kuusik, 2006, 54). She believed that by rejecting the traditional approach of seeing development exclusively as an instrument of political power and prestige, Estonia would be a more legitimate actor and have more success in political dialogues with partner countries (ibid, 56).

In the first and ground-setting law of Estonian development cooperation, the Estonian parliament decided that the country directs its development cooperation to regions that are starting or undergoing reforms similar to what it itself had implemented (EMFA, 2003). The underlying assumption is that all the former Soviet republics were pretty much at the same starting point as Estonia in 1991, but whereas Estonia was successful in its transition to a free market economy and democracy in the 1990s, the others have been less fortunate in various ways. According to Freedom House, the Baltic States were the only former Soviet republics that had attained the highest rating of “free” in terms of political rights and civil liberties by 2005. Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were “partly free” and the others non-democratic and “not free”. During the period of 1999-2005, only Ukraine had managed to improve its rating while all other post-Soviet countries deteriorated (Pettai, 2006, 15). During the same time period, Estonia managed to join the EU, which proves that the assessment of the situation by the Estonian leadership was accurate. Due to limited diplomatic relation

and a considerably different history, the Least Developed Countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America were not really considered as potential beneficiaries of Estonian experience and, in the beginning, Estonia did not even have an official position on supporting relevant EU initiatives (Kuusik, 2006, 60-61).

As I mentioned, the Development Plan of Estonian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid for the period 2006-2010 already stated quite precisely the four main themes of Estonian bilateral assistance. Moreover, the document expressly declares that Estonia will support only those countries that truly need assistance and which have taken responsibility for their own development. The policy was based on the conviction that effective development is only possible when state governance is directed to democracy and when the aid-recipient partner country has sufficient administrative capacity for cooperation. (EMFA, 2006, 18) The logic of Estonian development cooperation is further elaborated in the Estonian strategy for development cooperation for the period 2011-2015:

“For 2011-2015 the main way of Estonian development cooperation will be the communication of the social, state governance and administrative reform experience, which is of the greatest interest and need in the Eastern Partnership countries. Thus, Estonia’s ability to provide value added through its activities is the greatest in the countries of this region. It is also supported by the close existing political and economic relationships. The development of the Eastern Partnership countries is decisive from the point of view of ensuring the stable and peaceful development of the entire region and it has an important role in the achievement of Estonia’s foreign, security and economic policy goals. Given the prior close cooperation with the countries of the region, the capacity of Estonian institutions and their contacts with the countries have increased and based thereon the further development of cooperation is justified. The partner countries’ interest in Estonia’s assistance and the motivation of their governments to make changes has remained. International partners such as other donor countries and international organisations (e.g. the European Union) presume, given Estonia’s advantages of offering value added there, that Estonian development cooperation activities will be aimed at the development of these very countries.” (EMFA, 2010, 18-19)

To all intents and purposes, since the early days of Estonian development policy the main focus has been on the added value of Estonian aid, sharing transition experience and building democracy.

The vision of the Estonian government is explained by Vahur Made, an expert of EaP from the Estonian School of Diplomacy, who argues that the belief that the country has some special experience that can and should be shared with countries of the EaP,

including Georgia and Moldova, is deeply connected to the Estonian foreign policy. He explains that the shared Soviet past is strongly emphasized in this context and, therefore, the experience Estonia can share is more relevant than any experience of the EU member states that have not been a part of the former Soviet Union. (Made 2011, 72) Sentiments to this effect are expressed in numerous public statements by Estonian politicians, civil servants and also civil society organisations, including eGA. In fact, this view became prominent soon after Estonia joined the EU and started searching for an active foreign policy niche in order to gain more influence and visibility by serving as a “gateway” between the West and the East (Ehin, 2006, 23). Made further maintains that the Estonian experience-sharing with the EaP countries, which is usually implemented in the form of training partner country officials on “practical” matters regarding democratic institutions and different areas of socioeconomic reform, can be seen as “a promising tool for building up Estonia’s image of a reform-related knowledge-provider in the former Soviet space” (Made, 2001, 74). He agrees that all this is done with the goal of intra-EU visibility and positioning vis-à-vis other EU member states and with the hope to better access political and financial support of the EU (ibid, 68)

In fact, all the so-called “new member states” of the EU are working on democracy assistance as a part of their development cooperation and have used the same rationalisation for their actions. They all need to prove their Europeaness to the other EU member states and to the rest of the world, and presenting themselves as experts of democracy is the best way to achieve that goal. Also, after joining the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, these countries had an “action gap” in their foreign policies and democracy building was suitable filler for this space. (Jonavičius, 2008, 2) In some cases, such development cooperation can further be explained by the desire to create a “preventive shield” between “us” (Europe) and “them” (Russia) in order to guarantee national security and stability (ibid., 3). This was also the case in Estonia as the country’s EU Policy for 2004-2006 clearly stated that the EU must support democracy building in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia and other Southern Caucasus states “as this would also lead to the security and well-being of the citizens of EU” (Estonian Government, 2004, 37).

Thus, transition experience is perceived by Estonian politicians as something in which Estonia has a unique competency. This approach is similar to the concept of



“value-added”, which has been analysed in Finland, where a study examined whether a small donor country can offer something uniquely valuable in development cooperation, what that extra might be, and how all that affects the outcomes of aid (Koponen et al, 2012, 10). The authors of that study propose that while there is no commonly agreed definition for the political concept of ‘Finnish value-added’, they all entail the crosscutting theme of ‘Finnishness’ in:

- 1) “Deployment of Finnish technical expertise and technologies, and decisions of “Finnish priorities” that have been historically based on Finnish competencies.
- 2) Promotion of “Finnish (or Nordic/European) values” and behavioural patterns. /.../
- 3) Traits that Finland, or rather Finns, acquired during involvement with partner countries: ways of working and lessons learned during cooperation, including the best practices and the role of Finland in delivering aid within the given aid context.” (Koponen et al., 2012, 32-33)

Among other conclusions, the study postulated that, “from the aid recipient’s point of view, the key issue is not the different “strengths” the different donors would like to offer, but how to achieve the best possible end result in a particular situation with the resources that are available” (ibid., 157). The authors advocate that development intervention should be based on the partner countries’ own development strategies, and that each act of cooperation should be a result of consultations between the donor and the recipient of the assistance. Furthermore, they stress that even though each person participating a development project individually affects the process and the results of the whole action, they are also “products” of their cultural and historical environments and carry that baggage with them (ibid., 158-159)

In the Estonian case, the first two of the three themes used in the Finnish study also seem to be relevant as they are the most common rationalizations for development cooperation activities. The third theme is not important for the discussion of this thesis, because Estonia is a relatively new donor and has not built a specific image of it as a donor, yet. The “Estonian ways of working” in the development sector in that context have not been at the focus of attention. Therefore, my thesis will consider the concept of Estonian added value as the unique contribution Estonia has made in the Georgian development process through know-how that is specifically Estonian and/or by promoting values that are perceived characteristic to Estonia.

Besides stressing the importance of sharing its transition experience with other countries, Estonia has also outlined the moral obligation to assist others and “an opportunity to pay back the assistance that [Estonia] once received” (Ilves, 1999). It is felt to be the moral duty of the Estonia to help those countries with which they previously shared a common fate or system. At the same time, Estonia is year-by-year increasingly stressing the need for partner countries to be “ready to move towards a democratic society built on human rights” (EMFA, 2010, 4). This expectation is based on the logic that “a society based on democratic values as well as the existence of good governance practices in state organisations [is] a pre-requisite for stable and sustainable development” (EMFA, 2006, 16). In the Development Plan for 2006-2010, the government explains that based on Estonia’s experience, one effective way to make a society more open and to engage citizens is by using ICT. Therefore, they consider it to be “indispensable from the point of view of today’s development” (ibid.).

An opinion poll conducted in January 2005 (EMFA, 2005), which explored the views of Estonian opinion leaders about development issues, shows that at the time of starting the school computerisation project with Georgia, the vast majority were in favour of Estonia assisting other countries. The foremost justification for being a donor of development assistance was the fact that Estonia itself had once been an aid-recipient and had a moral obligation to help those in need. Some respondents also mentioned the pragmatic need to respect international agreements, the opportunity to positively shape Estonia’s identity, the necessity to improve Estonia’s image abroad and the possibility to learn more about other countries. The opinion leaders held a strong belief that Estonian aid should primarily be focused on improving education, democratic institutions and information society as well as on reducing child mortality and alleviating hunger and poverty. The poll also indicated that the best-known recipients of Estonia’s assistance were the South East Asian countries that suffered after the recent tsunami, but from other recipients Georgia was the most familiar example.

## **1.6. Literature review**

A burst of research has recently emerged about the unique aspects of development cooperation of the EU-12 countries. The Perspectives on European Politics and Society journal published a special issue “From Aid Recipients to Aid Donors?: Development Policies of Central and Eastern European States,” which besides offering

country-specific analysis also summarizes the advantages of the development cooperation programs of the region and their embodiment in a broader socio-political context. In the special issues, Ondřej Horký presents a useful insight to the rationale and practices of passing the Central and Eastern European transition experience on to developing countries. He argues that while the EU has materialized the transition experience in a 300-page database titled “European Transition Compendium” in 2010, the evidence of the transfer of such experience is still missing (Horký, 2012, 18).

However, Horký’s work mostly focuses on the political rhetoric of transition experience and deals less with the practical ways of transferring the experiences. Even if Horký is correct in hinting that perhaps there is no tangible or uniquely good transition experience, there could still be something valuable or unique in the methods used by Estonia and the other former aid-recipient countries that have now become donors, which might be useful to know. My research will complement the existing work with an analysis of concrete project-level information.

What is more, while the discussions about ownership are deepening and the transition experience discussion is expanding, there is no government-commissioned qualitative analysis about the impact of Estonian development assistance. Most of the analytical work has been done by Bachelor’s and Master’s students in Estonian universities. There is quite a few of them, but I will now give a brief overview of four writings that are most closely related to the questions under scrutiny in my thesis.

First, Iris Tomingas’ Master’s thesis from 2012 titled “Estonian Development Aid Cooperation: Aid Efficiency and Evaluation, Based on the Estonian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Programs for Years 2006-2010 and 2011-2015” tests the hypothesis that Estonian development cooperation is effective by applying the OECD Development Assistance Committee’s donor evaluation criteria. On the one hand, she concludes that based on analysing the goals stated in the Estonian policy documents, international agreements, Estonian existing evaluation system for projects and the grant application procedures of the Estonian MFA the development cooperation technically meet its declared objectives and its aid is therefore effective. On the other hand, the author resolves that among the weaknesses of the Estonian development cooperation system are not having a specific measurement basis for impact evaluation, unreasonably strong focus on financial reporting, rigid and irregular feedback to project applicants, and politicising the selection of partner countries. However, this thesis

mostly describes the Estonian development policy framework and the efficiency of the evaluation procedure without actually analysing the impact of the policies or concrete projects, which is what I am interested in.

Second, Nele Nõu questions in her Master's thesis from 2012 titled "Learning in Development Cooperation: The Case of Estonia" the popular conviction that Estonia has uniquely valuable knowledge as an aid-recipient that makes it particularly well qualified to deliver aid to other countries. She sets out to answer the question "whether there is a functioning learning system in Estonian development cooperation," effectively attempting to answer the question raised by Horký in his work about the tangibility of the concept of transition experience. Nõu looks at the different modes of knowledge sharing, levels of sharing the knowledge (individual, organisational and country level) and various learning types, and concludes that while there is no formal system of learning in Estonian development cooperation, the "intensive tacit knowledge sharing in addition to dynamic individual level learning benefit the overall information flow and social embeddedness to construct an informal system of learning" (Nõu, 2012, 53). Furthermore, she points out that the Estonian development experts rely too heavily on their own assessment of the results of their work, and proposes that further studies are needed to judge how the recipients of Estonian development cooperation perceive the assistance. This is exactly the gap that my work will fill.

Third, a Georgian student Eteri Gobronidze wrote a Master's thesis at the University of Tartu in 2013 titled "Marginal Position as a Potential Tool to Act and Influence: A Case Study of Estonian Development Cooperation Policy." Her work connects the theories of "positive marginality" and "nation branding" with the aim to offer a new understanding about how small donor countries such as Estonia can use their marginality as a tool to create change, influence policy and gain benefits through development cooperation. She tests Simon Anholt's idea that "besides the dominant competitive advantage that comes from economic strengths, there is also room in the busy marketplace for those who play by different rules, for example by providing some niche brands" (as cited in Gobronidze, 2013, 2). The author concludes that Estonia has successfully used nation branding in its development cooperation policy, particularly by promoting itself as an innovative post-Soviet country that has transition experience to share with the EU EaP countries. She goes on to argue that focusing on these priority countries has improved Estonia's visibility in the EU, as has the focus on ICT topics.

Similarly to Nele Nõu, Gobronidze asserts that further studies and evaluations are needed to know how successfully Estonia actually shares its experience. In order to fully understand how effective the nation branding has been, she also suggests studying the perspectives of the recipient countries and also other partners like the EU (Gobronidze, 2013, 75-76). Again, this is the gap in the literature that my work will seal.

Last but not least, Keit Spiegel wrote a Master's thesis in 2013 titled "The Necessity of Evaluation in Assessing the Efficiency of Development Cooperation: Estonian-Georgian Example," which is the best study focusing on the case of Georgia. Her research examined the following questions:

- "How essential is evaluation in assessing development cooperation efficiency?
- How efficient is Estonian development cooperation estimated to be in Georgia?
- Which methods should be introduced in order to evaluate the efficiency of Estonian development cooperation?
- How should the Estonian development assistance system evolve in the near future taking into consideration that each year the resources for development activities increase?" (Spiegel, 2013, 88)

Spiegel's analysis is based both on interviews with Estonian and international development experts and development cooperation project managers, and on monitoring and evaluating three Estonian development cooperation projects in Georgia that were implemented with funding from the Estonian MFA during the period of 2010-2012. One of the projects studied in her thesis focuses on constructing traffic grounds to Georgian pupils based on the example of Estonian experiences; the second supported the improvement of the quality of teaching at the Tbilisi and Batumi Universities with the aim to increase the qualification of the lectures and implement an effective e-learning system; and the third aimed to increase the capacity and ability of the civil society organisations belonging to the Georgian Eastern Partnership National Platform to do advocacy work and participate in policy making.

Spiegel's findings confirm my earlier statement that there is currently no system to evaluate or assess the efficiency or effectiveness of Estonian bilateral development cooperation. She argues that evaluations would enable to learn and to make future

projects/programmes more effective, and that the most urgent need in order for the Estonian development cooperation system as a whole to become better is to introduce a system of evaluation and monitoring. She does not offer, which method should be used for this evaluation. Based on her interviews, Spiegel concludes that the effectiveness of the Estonian-Georgian cooperation is ranked higher than the Estonian development cooperation as a whole. Her data suggests that even though Georgia is considered to be an eager partner that is interested in implementing reforms based on the Estonian experience, there are also problems with the sustainability of these reforms because of domestic political instability.

While there are similarities in terms of the research theme and case study country, my research has a clear distinction with Spiegel's. She covers the quite recent period 2010-2012 compared to the relatively early years of Estonian development cooperation studies in my thesis. Between these time periods, the actors in the Estonian development sector have become much more professional. Based on my personal experience of working in the sector for the past five and a half years, I can confidently say that the administrative capacity and skills of both the Estonian MFA as well as the project applicants/implementers has improved and several principal understandings have changed. Therefore, the periods are not fully comparable, but could still offer valuable information.

As we can see, the existing works are more theoretical than case-specific and have not drawn conclusions about the on-the-field impact of the development projects. Also, it is clear that the Estonian MFA does not have a system for evaluating the impact of the projects they fund. For these reasons, my thesis will be valuable for filling the gap and giving some idea about whether Estonian development cooperation is meeting the foundational commitments made both on the international and domestic policies.

### **1.7. Significance of the thesis**

This thesis is significant for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it is the first qualitative analysis of the impact of Estonian development cooperation. The questions of aid, development effectiveness and monitoring the outcomes of development activities have been under increasing scrutiny in Estonia by the policy makers as well as the civil society and academia. Due to the lack of a clear vision of the most reasonable and cost effective way of assessments, and due to the lack of financial resources, there are no

evaluations of such kind today. Therefore, my analysis of project-level empirical data will be a useful input to these discussions.

Secondly, I hope to contribute to the academic discussion about the concepts of “added value” and sharing “transition experiences” by combining in one study the perspectives of the donor and recipient side of a development project. One can find analysis about the concept of added value and how it is perceived by the participants of development projects, but there is a gap in the literature about whether at all and how does sharing transition experience offer added value for the recipients of aid. Hopefully, my examination will also chip in useful thoughts to the debate about the definition of transition experience.

Finally, my investigation will be useful for the organisations and persons that were directly involved in this cooperation project between Estonia and Georgia. It will show them whether their work was fruitful as well as what were the strengths and weaknesses of their approach to a development project. This information will enable them to modify their future actions where necessary. Not to mention that the same intelligence can be just as useful for any other donors or implementers of development interventions.

### **1.8. Limitations of the study**

My thesis gives quite a clear picture of the opinions of the programme participants about the impact and outcomes. Most key people from both Estonia and Georgia were interviewed and their views add up to a quite solid aggregate assessment. However, as this is a qualitative study, it is limited in that it is focused on the perceptions of the people who were involved in the planning and implementation of the Deer Leap programme, and does not analyse the broader societal feelings towards the programme. While my personal conversations with some students, parents, teachers and principals, who have participated in the Deer Leap programme, confirm the sentiments of the interviewees, it requires a separate study to learn more about the public opinion about using ICT in schools.

What is more, while this thesis looks at one of the biggest and well-known development cooperation projects between Estonia and Georgia, it is only one example and probably does not fully explain the dynamics and added value of Estonian development cooperation for Georgia or the relationship between the two countries. It is

possible that other organisations and project implementers have different approaches and definitely they face different contexts for working. In order to confirm whether the conclusions of this study can be applied more generally to Estonian development cooperation, studies about other cooperation projects in Georgia and about (similar) projects in other countries should be conducted.

## **1.9. Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is organized so that the first chapter introduces the topic of the thesis, my motivation for studying it, the research questions studied and the existing literature on the topic.

The second chapter offers an overview of the overall development scene in Georgia as well as the reasons why Estonia is cooperating with the country through its development cooperation policy.

The following chapter is where I describe what development cooperation for democracy building is, and whether it is possible to increase the level on democracy with the help of external assistance. The Estonian logic is to use development cooperation as the policy tool for sharing its own transition experience from a Soviet state to a democratic society with partner countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. As much of Estonian experience-sharing is done by providing technical assistance (TA) and consultations, I will also define the three main criteria I will use to evaluate the impact of the Estonian approach. Here I will also describe my method of data collection and analysis.

The next chapter is where I describe the Deer Leap case study in detail from the point the idea of it was developed to the time it was terminated.

After that I will answer the research questions proposed above and analyse the impact of the Deer Leap programme on the Georgian society in practical terms as well as in the broader sense of democratisation. At the end of the chapter the question of the added value of Estonia assistance is scrutinised.

The final chapter summarises my thesis by outlining the main conclusions of the research and the implications for researchers and practitioners.



## **II Description of the Georgian case**

### **2.1. Georgia as a recipient of development assistance**

Georgia with its 4.5 million inhabitants is located at the coast of the Black Sea on the border of Europe and Asia, between Russia, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Georgia's development has been affected by both global events and difficult relations with its neighbours. The country gained independence from the Russian Federation on 26 May 1918, but the Red Army re-conquered the territory in February 1921 and the communist rule lasted until 1991 when independence was restored. However, there was serious civil unrest in several regions of the country, most importantly in Tskhinvali and Abkhazia, which eventually led to a bloody civil war that lasted until the end of 1993 and forced hundreds of thousands of people into refuge both at home and abroad. The political instability that followed the crises lasted to varying degrees until a decade later when President Eduard Shevardnadze (re-elected into office in 2000) was replaced during the Rose Revolution and Mikheil Saakashvili was elected as the new president of Georgia in 2004. Of course, the new government did not solve all the problems and the (geopolitical) tensions remained, but a number of considerable reforms were successfully implemented and the country witnessed quite good economic growth.

After the civil war, consultations started with international financial institutions that resulted in an anti-crisis programme in February 1994 that foresaw measures for the socio-economic improvement of the country. During the period 1996-1997, Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP) growth boosted and reached 10-12 percent per annum by 1997. Furthermore, hyperinflation was restrained from an annualised 13 000 percent in 1993 to 7.2 percent in 1997. Even as the GDP continued to rise and inflation was under control, the Georgian economy took a serious blow after the Russian financial crisis of 1998. To make thing worse, serious droughts devastated the agrarian-based economy in 1998 and 2000 putting communities at risk of famine. (IMF, 2003, 3). It was evident that Georgia was tightly connected to the global economy.

To overcome the difficult times, the Georgian government took numerous loans. In 2002, the country had a foreign debt equalled of 1 592.64 million US dollars, which constituted a massive 47.42 percent of the GDP. Approximately half of the dept was

payable to international financial organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the other half to bilateral creditors (mostly Turkmenistan and Russia). In the early 2000s, Georgia faced serious challenges with servicing the debt and worked on restructuring the debt on concessional terms. (IMF, 2003, 6)

The state of affairs in Georgia in the early 2000s and the country's vision for development until 2015 is comprehensively described in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP) in 2003. It was clearly stated that despite the difficult past, "Georgia has a realistic capability to be one of the exemplary countries in the world that can combat [the disease of poverty] that jeopardizes democracy, and undermines statehood and independence" (IMF, 2003, 1). A major opportunity for generating income for Georgia was seen in using the potential of its geographic location on the transport corridor connecting Europe and Asia. However, most people were still self-employed in the agricultural sector and their income was dependent on this. 15 percent of the population lived in extreme poverty in 2002 and while urban poverty was deeper and more severe, that population group had better access to education and health care services. (ibid., 9-11)

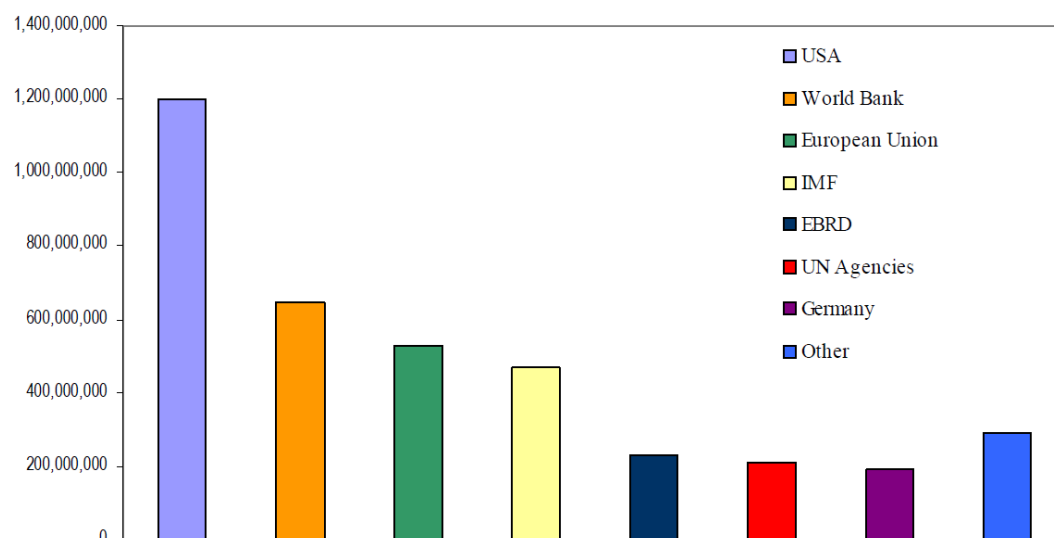
The PRSP make numerous references to the imperative need to establish democracy in Georgia without offering a clear definition for the term. However, it is implied that the concept includes citizens' active participation in policy making and development of the country, transparent governance, as well as freedom of speech and of the media, and the transition to a free market economy. It is highlighted in the document that decentralisation of public administration "is a fundamental and defining condition of the principle that the government should be as close to people as possible" (IMF, 2003, 33). Moreover, The document states that development and democratisation can be achieved not only through entrepreneurship and economic growth, but also by taking advantage of science and ICT as "technology represents a powerful instrument for public participation in democratic institutions and provides a comprehensive link between society and the state" (ibid., 26).

Pertinent to my thesis, it is important to point out that at that time Georgia had practically no information infrastructure in place that could contribute to economic growth or enhancing democracy. The level of ICT infrastructure was extremely low and there were large divides between the rich and poor, urban and rural populations with

mountainous regions being the most disadvantaged. Thus, it is noteworthy that the guiding document for developing the country prescribed that ICT infrastructure must be developed and computer literacy of the population enhanced in order to resolve communication and digital inequalities. (IMF, 2003, 18) Specifically, the PRSP set out to educate the society in technological and especially computer studies, to develop a modern communication and digital network to cover the whole country, and to introduce modern technologies and promote an information society (ibid., 26). The document listed 138 individual activities that were to take place between 2003 and 2005 with the total value of 3.8 billion US dollars. 1.4 percent of the planned expenditure was to be spent on the ICT sector with the government budget covering only 4 percent of that and the rest being in deficit, which would be filled with external financing (ibid., 56).

In 2003, the biggest donors of assistance to Georgia were the United States, World Bank, EU, IMF (approximately 70% of total assistance). The United States was the single largest donor with a contribution exceeding 1.2 billion US dollars. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, various UN agencies and Germany were among other significant donors (see Chart 1).

*Chart 1: Donor assistance in US dollars*



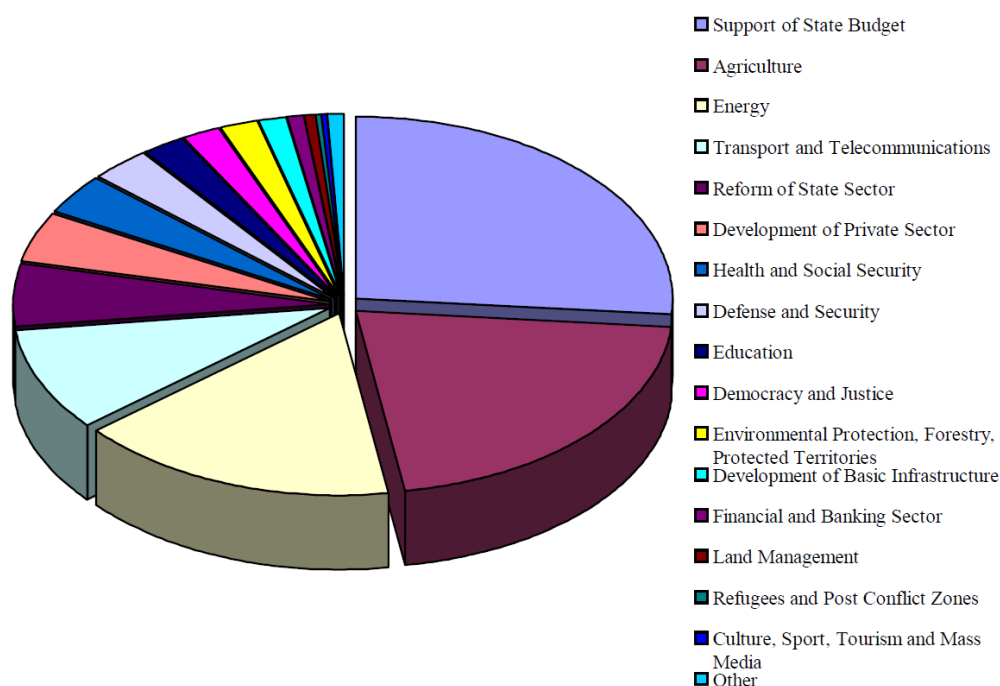
*Source: IMF, 2003, 86*

The PRSP itself was prepared between 2001 and 2003 with technical assistance from the European Commission, the United Kingdom's Department for International

Development, UNDP, Poverty Reduction Strategies Trust Fund, United States Agency for International Development, World Bank and the Netherlands (IMF, 2003, 91).

In terms of thematic sectors, softer spheres with social impact like health care, education, environmental protection or even democracy-building did not receive as much funding compared the topics related to macro-economic development (see Chart 2). Donors put the most resources into state budget support, agriculture, humanitarian assistance, energy and transportation and telecommunications. (IMF, 2003, 87) However, the World Bank did support the Education Strengthening and Realignment Project that started in 2002 with 25.9 million US dollars and the Social Investment Fund with 20 million US dollars that among other causes were used to rehabilitate school infrastructure. (ibid., 87-88).

*Chart 2: Proportion of donor assistance by sector*



*Source: IMF, 2003, 87*

The PRSP brought attention to the substantial international assistance that Georgia had received since regaining independence and stressed the importance of using aid more effectively by improving the coordination between the government and donors as well as among different donors. The document also stresses the necessity to utilise the capabilities of local experts more and take their opinions into consideration.

In addition, it was deemed important to learn from the successes and failures of the socio-economic reforms in other countries in order to successfully achieve development and poverty reduction at home. (IMF, 2003, 15)

## **2.2. Estonian- Georgian development cooperation**

Georgia is one of the most important priority partners of Estonian bilateral development cooperation. Development cooperation between Estonia and Georgia started in 2000 when Estonia dispersed approximately 96 000 euros to the Estonian Red Cross in response to the appeal of the International Red Cross Federation for relieving the food shortage caused by a drought in that summer, and another 46 000 euros for a project to build the capacity of the Georgian civil society to participate in policy making (EMFA 2014c). In total, Estonia has spent around 4.4 million euros on development cooperation and humanitarian aid to Georgia throughout the years. Out of this, 3.4 million euros have been dedicated to bilateral development projects with 92 percent of them funded through the Estonian MFA. A little bit more than a third of the bilateral projects have focused on human development issues like improving the educational system (this includes the Deer Leap project) and empowering women; approximately a third on supporting peace, democracy and human rights; and the rest has been divided between activities related to economic development, sustainable growth and other issues (EMFA, 2014a).

In a broad sense, Estonia and Georgia have substantial similarities in their recent history. Both countries became independent in 1918, were incorporated into the Soviet Union during the World War II, and regained independence in 1991. While during the first years of re-independence, the relations focused mostly on defence cooperation, the nature of the interactions expanded quite soon. The relationship became much more intense after the Rose Revolution of Georgia in November 2003 by which time the freshly elected President Eduard Shevardnadze was replaced with Mikheil Saakashvili after the people protested against rigged election results. The next month, Estonia sent a delegation from its Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a mission to Georgia to establish contacts with the new leadership. In March 2004, another delegation of Estonian government officials visited Georgia and soon after that a number of cooperation projects were signed to support the state-building there. On the one hand, it was evident that the two countries share a similar developmental path as they are both small states

that have had to go through a transition process. On the other hand, and probably even more importantly, while it was not directly stated by most of the interviewees, it was hinted several times during the interviews that the shared geopolitical concern over Russia also united the two countries and encouraged deeper cooperation.

In practical terms, it was quite difficult for Estonia to establish a mechanism for supporting Georgia, because it did not have an embassy in Tbilisi. However, by 2004 Estonia had already developed a strong international reputation in the e-governance sector and the Estonian MFA was certain that something could be done in this field. By the time the Deer Leap cooperation started, Estonia had been doing development work for approximately six years. During that time, some priority thematic areas and partner countries had started to emerge. Educational sector in Georgia was one of these heightened interests and the mapping by the Estonian MFA after the Rose Revolution clearly indicated that sharing the Tiger Leap experience is something that the Georgian government was interested in and that Estonia was capable of doing thanks to an existing organisation eGA. Therefore, it was decided after the mapping exercise that cooperation with Georgia in the educational sector was the perfect channel to offer support and through a politically neutral policy transfer. Estonian-Georgian relations reached a significant milestone in 2006 with the opening of the Estonian embassy in Tbilisi. (Andrespok, 2008)

There can be little doubt that the (development cooperation) relationship between Estonia and Georgia was also profoundly shaped by the fact that Estonia joined the EU in 2004. Georgia's interests were lined in the same direction and learning from the transition experience of the friendly "brother" – Estonia – was a natural path towards better integration into the EU. The interest for cooperation was mutual – Estonia believed it had unique lessons to share with Georgia and other countries from the Soviet Union. Therefore, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were chosen as the priority partners for Estonia between 2006 and 2010. Urmas Paet, minister of foreign affairs of Estonia explained the selection of partners in his speech to the parliament in 2006 by saying that "Estonia is not a superstate. In accordance with the fact, [it has] to be flexible when adapting to situations, when looking for partners to cooperate with, and when making use of those spheres on which [it] can actually exert some influence" (as cited in Andrespok, 2008).

The Estonian MFA representative pointed out in the interview that, in general, the Estonian population then was quite critical of the idea of Estonia offering development assistance to other countries. The common opinion was that there are still enough problems at home to take care of and that all of the government's funds should serve the purpose of solving those. While supporting direct emergency relief missions of the Estonian Rescue Board were accepted, there was scepticism towards long term development cooperation. However, the Estonian MFA and their domestic partners from the civil society knew that the people were more willing to support Georgia and that Tiger Leap would be good example, because the Estonian programme had been successful and welcomed at home. Thus, the MFA hoped that the taxpayers would better understand why and how such programmes are necessary for the development of Georgia.

Yet another noteworthy statement of both the representatives of eGA and the Estonian MFA was that they saw the project as an opportunity for Estonia to show to the world that the progress it had made was so positive and valuable that other countries follow it. Similarly to what Gobronidze argued in her thesis, the Deer Leap cooperation with Georgia was a way to improve Estonia's reputation on the international scene. It later turned out that thanks to successful lobbying by Estonians and after Georgia had implemented their reforms, other countries also turned to Estonia to ask for advice about taking ICT to schools and other e-governance issues.

### **III Democratisation through sharing transition experience**

In this chapter, I will lay out the theoretical and methodological framework of my thesis. I will explain what is meant by democratisation, how it is done through sharing transition experience, and what the Estonian logic for engaging in such activities is. In addition, I will identify the criteria I use for evaluating how effectively Estonia shared its experience in the case study at hand.

#### **3.1. Democracy and development**

An underlying assumption of development cooperation for democracy building is that it is possible to increase the level on democracy with the help of external assistance. Thomas Carothers, one of the leading authors on democratisation in transitional and developing countries has distinguished between two types of democracy assistance – political and developmental. The political approach is based on a fairly narrow view of democracy that is centred mainly on elections and political liberties and exercised through supporting elections, political parties or politically oriented civil society groups. Proponents of this approach believe that democracy should be supported “as a positive value in itself” and they are not inclined to extend support to social or economic elements. They support the democrats’ struggle against the nondemocrats through explicit assistance to political actors themselves or through indirect support to key institutions like the independent media or judiciary. (Carothers, 2009, 7)

The developmental approach to democracy assistance is broader as it deals with questions of equality, justice and democratisation as a slow process of “incremental, long-term change in a wide range of political and socioeconomic sectors, frequently emphasizing governance and the building of a well-functioning state” (Carothers, 2009, 5). It is based on the belief that aspects of democratic governance such as transparency or accountability lead to more equitable socioeconomic national development. Adherents to this approach use indirect methods of assisting and prefer enhancing good governance to strengthening political opposition. It is considered important to maintain good relations with the partner country government and to avoid becoming “too political”, which also safeguards against charges of external interventionism. (ibid., 9) While the political approach is a “process of struggle often marked by key junctures,”



then the developmental approach sees democratisation “as a slow, iterative process, measured in decades and marked by the gradual accumulation of small gains” (ibid., 7-8).

Richard Youngs, a prominent author on European democracy promotion and democratisation further distinguishes between supporting “democracy as product” and “democracy as process” and argues that European donors have traditionally overemphasised the latter (Youngs, 2007, 71). He points out that many analysts have explained how only focusing on the socioeconomic changes and supporting the civil society is not a sustainable approach when the political elites and institutions as well as the political culture do not develop alongside. “A certain degree of democratic quality might itself be needed before economic and good governance reforms or the opening up of the civil society are likely to have a beneficial impact on enhancing that same quality of democratic procedures” (ibid., 70). Kristi Raik, who has researched the European Neighbourhood Policy and democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe, also raises the question whether external assistance is able to build democratic societies, and backs Youngs’ opinion that while such support may contribute to democratic reforms, sustainable changes will not take place without the domestic will to democratise. She even claims that “it is quite impossible to measure the impact of external actors or even to maintain a boundary between domestic and international factors” (Raik, 2006, 16).

Likewise, Carothers brings up the question of effectiveness of both the political and the developmental approach. He says that while the former may have a catalytic effect on democratisation, it is sometimes insufficient and limiting. (Carothers, 2006, 9-10) Strengths of the latter are that it allows entry into tense and restrictive political situations, encourages sustained engagement, and enables nurturing links between political and socioeconomic reforms. Then again, he points out “that the developmental approach sometimes produces democracy programs that are indirect to the point of being toothless,” and that the donors contribute to “a grab bag of aid programmes” without really considering whether they bring about political change. (ibid., 10-11) He concludes by maintaining that neither approach is inherently better than the other and that the effectiveness depends on the context of each situation. In his views, the basic best practices of democracy assistance include tailoring programs to the partner country’s needs, allowing flexibility in the programming and implementation, as well as empowering local actors to become the primary change agents (ibid., 12).

Raik is in agreement with this explanation and utters that, despite potential risks of failure, external assistance is still relevant, because it contributes to a bigger process of democracy building. While it is difficult to achieve meaningful results in completely non-democratic environments or during the breakthrough phase, the chances of success are better in more stable situations. Raik contends that if “the leadership is committed to reforms and open to external influence, assistance from outside is not crucial in the sense of changing the direction, but it may be essential for the capability of government to actually implement reforms” (2006, 38). The ultimate key to reforms is still in the hands of the country itself, but it is possible to influence the process from outside. Marcin Zaborowski’s analysis of the empirical evidence from Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) proves exactly this argument by showing how external assistance from the United States, Germany and other donors did lead to a transformation and that “policy transfer by inspiration (or lesson-drawing)” was probably the most substantial kind of external influence in these four and all other post-communist countries (Zaborowski, 2005, 30).

It should be mentioned that much of the literature about development and democratisation is focused on the relationship between the “West” and the “Rest”. In the case of Estonia and other young donors of development assistance, these terms fall in a completely new context and their relevance for analysis is questionable. My own impression from working in the Estonian development cooperation sector and with colleagues from all the EU member states posits that there is a schizophrenic confusion whether the new donors from the Eastern European region are considered “West” or rather still the “East”, and consequently whether they should be regarded as being in the global “North” or “South”. Analysts of development interventions in African or Asian states have declared that democracy assistance to developing countries is tightly interconnected with the global economic power structures and that it “is the expansion of the Western capitalist economy that lurks behind the current support for democratisation in the third world” (Hossain et al., 2003, 15). They go on to say that the elements of democratisation like transparency or good governance are the foundation for the expansion of capital and “may determine the form and type of democracy to be supported” (ibid.). Due to the East-West and North-South confusion, it is difficult to say with certainty how important this aspect is in the development cooperation programmes of the new donors of the EU like Estonia. As I explained in the first chapter, the

question of finding a niche in the European foreign policy is probably much more important.

### **3.2. Evaluating the transfer of experiences between countries**

Like I mentioned, there are questions about the feasibility of exporting democracy or the transition experiences from countries like Estonia to other post-Soviet countries in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU or elsewhere in the world. In the case of Estonia, technical assistance or technical cooperation – the transfer of knowledge, skills, know-how and advice – makes up a vast majority of its development cooperation. On the one hand, there is some evidence that most of the TA projects reach their immediate objectives (Riddell, 2007, 204). On the other hand, this type of development work has been criticized for ineffectiveness in research conducted by both international civil society organisations and intergovernmental organisations, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Effectiveness is defined by the leading coordinating body on development assistance, OECD as “the extent to which the development intervention’s objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance” (OECD, 2002, 20). Lack of systemic research on the effectiveness and impact of the transfer of know-how as a means of assistance is a challenge for all donors. A study of UN agencies demonstrated that “there were few, if any, pressures on donors to reduce costs by monitoring, analysing and trying to keep down the overall cost” of sharing know-how (Riddell, 2007, 204). Getting good evidence about the impact of such aid becomes even more complicated when these actions are evaluated as a part of a long-term and inclusionary process of capacity development. In those cases, the contributions to capacity development are reported on by simple headcounts of the people that went on courses or were trained (ibid, 208) and insufficient analysis is conducted on how the process itself was organized. Not to mention the fact that hardly any needs-assessments are conducted prior to engaging in knowledge-sharing projects (ibid, 209).

One of the most blatant examples of discontent with the way TA has been planned and implemented is the fact that the Dutch government closed down its department responsible for sending Dutch experts to developing countries, because they felt that TA had failed to foster and maintain skills and build capacities of the developing countries

(Riddell, 2007, 206). A joint report by Austria and Denmark in 2007 (see Land) and an analysis by the global anti-poverty agency ActionAid one year earlier (ActionAid, 2006, 48) list the low cost-effectiveness, poor coordination, insufficient evaluation of effectiveness and very limited opportunities for aid recipients to exercise ownership over the planning of TA as the main reasons for questioning its merits as a development tool. Furthermore, much of the TA is short-term and not based on the long-term bilateral agreements, which are considered as critical prerequisites for aid effectiveness (Land, 2007, vii).

On the positive side, it has been said that TA “for institutional development has functioned best in environments where outputs are clear, measurable and relatively non-controversial” and in “environments where goals are amorphous, potentially conflicting and/or politically sensitive, the success record in capacity building has been much more mixed” (Arndt, 2000, 157). Since ICT is quite a straightforward issue, one could hypothesize that TA can be a perfectly suitable tool for achieving a positive change in such an issue as computerising the schools. Still, the question remains about the broader socioeconomic developmental impact.

Acknowledging the challenges of aid effectiveness, politicians have debated on this issue for more than two decades. The first high level meeting on aid effectiveness took place in Rome in 2003, and in 2005, nearly all DAC donors and more than 60 developing countries signed up to the Paris Declaration agreeing to improve aid effectiveness by 2010 via stronger alignment with developing countries’ needs, more harmonization between the donors, increasing the ownership of aid recipient countries, enforcing mutual accountability and managing for results (OECD, 2008, 1). In 2008, the development actors met again in Accra to evaluate the progress made with implementing the Paris Declaration, and to adopt a concrete agenda for actions necessary to accelerate the achievement of results (ibid., 14). After the deadline for fulfilling the goals of the Paris Declaration expired, the donors and recipients agreed that even though there has been some progress, quite a lot still remains to be done in order to meet all the targets. The leaders of the world met again in Busan, South Korea at the end of 2011 at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to put in place a new framework for increasing the quality of aid in order to achieve the globally agreed Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation states that the global community embraces the diversity that

underpins all partnerships and that ownership of development priorities by developing countries is one of the shared principles that all stakeholders are to respect. It goes on to explain that development partnerships can only succeed if they are headed by developing countries and implement approaches that are tailored to the recipient countries' contexts and needs. (OECD, 2011b) The Busan Partnership and several other documents regulating the delivery of aid suggest that the responsibility for guaranteeing ownership is a matter of mutual responsibility – both the donors and recipients of aid are expected to take responsibility for the achievement of true development.

Since there are no evident grounds to assume that Estonian development cooperation is distinctively better than the other donors', the question has emerged about the effectiveness of its assistance. I would argue that the debate is actually more comprehensive and centres on the question about the actual impact of the Estonian interventions. According to OECD's definition, effectiveness in the broadest sense is the aggregate measure of how successfully and sustainably the expected results and effects – intended or unintended, due directly or indirectly to an intervention – were achieved. (OECD, 2002, 20-21). It is a relatively broad concept, where combinations of indicators of are used to evaluate the long-term and lasting consequences of the development cooperation action. My analysis of the impact of the Estonian assistance will be based on this same characterisation, which will best illuminate the answers to my research questions.

There are many guides for evaluating the delivery of aid ranging from project evaluations to comprehensive assessments of donor countries and institutions. As I have set out to study one development intervention and draw inductive conclusions from this about the behaviour of Estonia as a donor country in general, none of the existing systems are quite suitable for utilisation here. For example, analysing the cost-effectiveness of the budget allocations (a common indicators used in project evaluation models) of each individual action funded by the Estonian MFA would lead me to overly detailed and technical descriptions without suggesting much about the actual impact the of intervention. The Global Partnership Monitoring Framework that was set up after the high level meeting in Busan is primarily focused on how donors design their overall development cooperation programmes, which makes its evaluation criteria too broad for analysing one project. Therefore, I have selected three indicators that are present in many of the existing evaluation guides and that will, in my opinion, give useful

information about how effective Estonia is as a donor and what was the real impact of the case study under scrutiny in my thesis. Hopefully, future studies will focus on other indicators to assess the impact of Estonian development actions in even greater detail.

### **3.3.1. Relevance**

Taking a more comprehensive look, it ought to be analysed how well the intervention is linked to the “beneficiaries’ requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners’ and donors’ policies” or what the OECD calls relevance of the intervention (OECD, 2002, 32). The foundational idea for this is that “donors cannot develop a country; a country can only develop itself” (OECD, 2005, 15). The Busan Partnership document similarly to the Paris Declaration explicitly states that one of the keys to effective development is aligning all actions with the priorities and policies set out by developing countries themselves (OECD, 2011b, 3). This means that the donors commit to the following:

- “Base their overall support — country strategies, policy dialogues and development co-operation programmes — on partners’ national development strategies and periodic reviews of progress in implementing these strategies
- Draw conditions, whenever possible, from a partner’s national development strategy or its annual review of progress in implementing this strategy. Other conditions would be included only when a sound justification exists and would be undertaken transparently and in close consultation with other donors and stake holders.
- Link funding to a single framework of conditions and/or a manageable set of indicators derived from the national development strategy. This does not mean that all donors have identical conditions, but that each donor’s conditions should be derived from a common streamlined framework aimed at achieving lasting results.” (OECD, 2008, 3)

Reports have found that aligning with partner countries’ priorities, “can provide incentives and momentum to help strengthen capacity, enhance domestic accountability and contribute to more sustainable institutions” (OECD, 2011a, 43).

In terms of the relevance to Georgia as the aid-recipient country, it is necessary to examine whether at all and to what extent the people in Georgia actually needed a school computerisation programme like the Deer Leap, and whether the intervention was in line with the national development framework defined by the government. The most comprehensive source of information for evaluating the Georgian needs and priorities is the PRSP published in 2003. The document was crafted due to the demand

from the World Bank and the IMF in order to have access to debt relief and concessional funds, and it details all the changes that the government foresees in order to achieve development results. The OECD believes that “in countries where the government actively drives the development agenda and articulates its harmonisation and alignment issues (in the [PRSP] or equivalent processes), donors respond by intensifying their efforts to harmonise and align their activities on the ground” (OECD, 2005, 23). They also point out that there are problems with unclear country policies of the aid-recipients, lack of medium-term frameworks that link country priorities to their budget decisions and timetables, and challenges with agreeing on what basis disbursement will be made (*ibid.*, 9). It is my aim to analyse how well the Estonian intervention was aligned with the Georgian PRSP, how it related to the Georgian national budget and how all that was perceived by the people on the recipient and of the cooperation project.

Relevance of the intervention is also linked to the question of coordination. More specifically, I refer to the idea that when considering how the intervention fits into the national context of an aid recipient, the donors should also make sure that their assistance is not irrelevant in the sense that it is doubling something that is already done by another donor. Analysts have pointed out that donors hardly discuss their programmes with other contributors, leading to a duplications of activities (Riddell, 2007, 205) and “a large number of uncoordinated /.../ projects running roughshod over local administrative structures and pursuing a welter of goals” (Arndt, 2000, 166). Uncoordinated and redundant interventions run the risk of not being relevant, because the development goals they are addressing have already been achieved by other means. Duplication is not efficient and does not have a meaningful impact.

From the donor’s perspective, it is necessary to analyse how the development assistance to Georgia through the Deer Leap project is linked to Estonian development cooperation policy and national perceptions. The Estonian logic for participating in the cooperation project was already explained in the introduction, but based on the data collected, I will attempt to find out, whether the empirical evidence suggest that this specific case study was coherent with that thinking.

Even though international agreements like the Busan Partnership are primarily focused on national level programming of development assistance, I believe that the

principle of relevance can be considered on a project level, too. In this thesis, I will look a little bit on both levels.

### **3.3.2. Ownership**

Tightly connected to the question of relevance is that of ownership. One of the most discussed issues regarding development cooperation is how much say the aid-recipients have over the whole process of their development and the concrete interventions taking place under the title of development assistance. However, despite the vocal demand for ownership at country, project and grass roots level, there is quite little common understanding among the different stakeholders from donor and recipient countries about how the implementation of ownership should look like or how to evaluate whether it has been achieved. There are no clear-cut answers in the academic works, either. Geir Ambro has criticised that “the main body of literature regarding local ownership is donor-oriented, donor generated, and the perspectives of South and of project communities are mainly missing” (Ambro 2006, 7). Since ownership is an important indicator of the quality of the cooperation process, I find it beneficial to include it in this thesis as an element of analysis from both the donor and the recipient country side to find out how the concept is perceived, how it is put into practice, and how it affected the outcome of the process.

A major matter that is discussed is what level of ownership should be at the centre of attention. For example, Horner and Power (2009, i) argue that already in the Paris Declaration, the principle of ownership was interpreted as ownership of the development agenda by the executive branches of government, rather than democratic ownership by the broader citizenry. In their view, this undermines efforts to build true and sustainable democracies in developing countries. The question of “whose ownership?” is thoroughly debated by Stefan Meyer and Nils-Sjard Schulz. The authors examine how ownership of aid flows was guaranteed in four different country cases and conclude that “ownership and mutual accountability must be taken as the cornerstones when tracking the impact of donors’ presence in local processes of deepening democracy,” and that in the first order donors should “determine how much policy space is conceded to government and how much of this space is shared downwards beyond the executive” (Meyer & Schulz, 2008, 31). They add that including the citizens or organised civil society is essential.



To balance the government-centred approach, civil society organisations have talked about “democratic ownership”, which refers to the grass-roots level involvement in development activities. It means that in all stages of project implementation, from planning to evaluation, the final beneficiaries should be consulted. This practice is not common, as vividly demonstrated in a recent book by the CDA Collaborative Learning Projects from Cambridge, Massachusetts titled “Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid” . The study of 6 000 aid recipients revealed that the fact that policies and aid programs are commonly discussed and written by donors undermines partnership and a sense of mutual respect, which in turn creates resentment as the recipients see such external agendas as overly prescriptive and difficult to adapt to contextual realities (Anderson et al., 2012, 63). Therefore, the question that will be analysed in my thesis is whether the final beneficiaries were consulted during the Deer Leap programme, whether they actually benefitted from the intervention, and whether they feel that they did.

The complexity of guaranteeing ownership is that while the capacity of developing countries’ governments strongly inhibits the impact of aid, it is also perceived to be the task of development assistance to raise the capacities of recipients’ institutions, which again is not possible without the recipient country’s clear commitment to the development process (Riddell, 2007, 216). What is more, the aid recipients continuously invite donors to fill the huge and persisting skill shortages in their countries, creating an easily accessible market for the donors to “sell” their expertise and encouraging even more the supply-driven provision of TA. On the one hand, this situation is probably the consequence of globalization, which drives on the idea that knowledge and skills are the greatest advancers of development. (ibid., 207) On the other hand, the recipient countries have not been assertive enough in taking control when they feel that donors are forcing on them plans that do not meet their development objectives (ibid., 210). Research by academicians and donors themselves suggests that more concrete efforts to enhance the ownership by systematically supporting genuine demand-driven and performance-oriented initiatives of recipients would be the step towards achieving greater effectiveness in this regard (OECD, 2011a, 38).

Some financial concerns are also linked to the question of ownership. A study of UN agencies demonstrated that “donors traditionally sought to fill skill gaps by

obtaining TA skills solely from their own countries /.../ when alternative sources would certainly have reduced costs considerably” (Riddell, 2007, 204). The work of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London confirms that in many cases it would be possible to get qualified experts from the developing countries to replace the donors’ experts at quarter of the costs (ibid., 435). Logically, the ineffectiveness resulting from the personnel choice could be solved by increasing the role of recipient countries in the planning and implementing of the development cooperation. Yet, historically donors have not seen “the need to discuss with recipients decisions that donors alone made about allocating and spending “their” aid on foreign consultants” (Riddell, 2007, 204). A well-designed intervention should not put further tension on the already stressed national budget of a developing country. The Austrian-Danish study on TA further concludes that the recipient countries expect the deployed TA personnel to be directly accountable to them, but this is often still not the case and the influence of the donors as “paymasters” is likely to remain strong if available hybrid management mechanisms are not put into practice (Land viii).

To put it briefly, I will analyse how the concept of ownership was enacted in the Deer Leap intervention. In particular, I will focus on how guaranteeing ownership of the recipient was perceived by both sides of the cooperation project; how the needs and opinions of different Georgian stakeholders were taken into account; whether the intervention was demand-driven or donor-driven; and whether mutual accountability to guarantee ownership was realised.

### ***3.3.3. Sustainability***

The Busan Partnership declares that sustainable development results are the end goal of both the donors’ and aid-recipients’ developmental commitments (OECD, 2011b, 2). In this conceptualisation, sustainability refers to “the continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed,” as well as “the probability of continued long-term benefits [and] resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time” (OECD, 2002, 36). Based on this definition, a development intervention is sustainable when the positive consequences of the action still subsist a long time after the external assistance ends, and when it is capable of resisting possible elements that threaten the continuation of these outcomes. Common logic also says that there is little meaning in interventions that do not have a lasting

positive impact on the beneficiaries. There is an anecdotally vast amount of empirical experience of interventions that effectively ended when the formal project funding ended. What is more, besides asking whether the benefits of the programme continued after a development intervention, the factors that influenced the achievement of the sustainability should also be investigated. I will base my analysis of the Deer Leap programme on the assumptions and definition presented by the OECD. I suppose that even if the concrete activities of the Deer Leap did not continue after the programme formally ended, some follow-up activities would also be a sign that the spirit of the intervention carried on and/or that the knowledge generated during the programme is used to achieve the overall objective of the programme, thus guaranteeing sustainability.

A prerequisite for evaluating sustainability is assessing how well the programme achieved the goals set out in the planning phase. In the OECD language, this is also referred to as performance measurement (OECD, 2002, 29). It is only natural to expect the project designers and implementers to know best what they want to achieve and for which purposes. In my thesis, this analysis will mainly be based on the Master Plan for computerising the Georgian Schools (2005), which is the most comprehensive and legitimate statement of goals for the cooperation and partly also for the educational reform in Georgian schools. In addition, the applications and reports from eGA to the Estonian MFA and other project materials will be included to have a better understanding of what was the expectation of the MFA from the implementers of the programme.

Furthermore, how well the results are attained and sustained depends on the way assistance is delivered. Anthropologists stress the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need to account for the differences of the meaning systems between the trainer and the trainee (Olivier de Sardan, 2005, 153). The anthropologists remind the providers of TA that their technical messages and the skills they import to the recipient communities will be met with existing competences and skills, which “are based on complex fields of knowledge and meaning systems that evolve continuously” (ibid., 155). For example, the existing knowledge in the field of management is inextricably linked to other social norms ruling the communities (ibid, 161) and will influence how the new knowledge will be accepted and adopted. So, considering the specific knowledge context of the recipient country demands for well-grafted and meaningful interventions and may be the guarantee for success. Based on the presented logic, one could assume that if the

knowledge transferred to the partner country does not fit the social norms and thinking, then positive results may not be achieved or they would not be sustained for a long time. My thesis will analyse how these recommendations were taken into account in the case study under examination. Presuming that Estonia and Georgia share quite many experiences from the past and are not that distant culturally, one can assume that there ought not to be big cultural clashes.

Related to the financial side of personnel choice that I discussed in connection to ownership, there are also possible repercussions in terms of sustainable knowledge management. In order to guarantee that the new knowledge created during the intervention will contribute towards the long-term development of the partner country, the human capital (i.e. trained specialists) should somehow keep using their knowledge for the betterment of their country and society. It has been noted by analysts that some development interventions have created a *de facto* brain drain from the countries they were trying to capacitate, because the people find that their new expertise is better paid somewhere else. Even more paradoxical is the fact that the newly trained skilled people often leave their home-countries “to work abroad, often in the same countries where the skill trainers came” from (Riddell, 2007, 207). Nevertheless, some evidence shows that the situation may not be as dramatic as one might assume, because the actual magnitude of the brain drain may not be unacceptably large (Arndt, 2000, 169). In this study, I will evaluate the effect the Deer Leap programme had on the knowledge management in Georgia both in terms of how well the know-how and advice was accepted, adopted and sustained, as well as whether the intervention resulted in positive or negative changes in human capital.

### **3.3. Data collection and interviewees**

As I explained above, there is an extremely limited amount of qualitative research available about Estonian development cooperation and this is why I chose to focus on qualitative examination of the impact of the Deer Leap programme in Georgia. At the outset, secondary data was collected from project materials (applications and reports), which I attained from the implementers of the programme and the public development cooperation database of the Estonian MFA. These documents show the formally stated rationale for starting the actions, the specific context at the time of starting the programme, the desired results and the implementer’s self-reflection about

the impact of its activities. Naturally, other relevant policy strategies, action plans and documentation produced during the Deer Leap programme were also included to explain the broader context under which the case study took place.

In addition to the text analysis, 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. Interviews were chosen as the primary method, because they enable getting a deep understanding of the rationale and stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of the Deer Leap programme. 11 people (ten Georgian and one Estonian) were interviewed during a field mission to Tbilisi, Georgia in November 2013 and three (all Estonian) in Tallinn, Estonia over the period of December 2013-April 2014. Appointments were scheduled by email and phone, but the interviews were conducted as face-to-face conversations. The duration of the interviews was between 40 and 100 minutes. All interviews with Estonian participants were held in Estonian, most of those in Georgia in English and a couple also in Russian. The interviews were recorded digitally.

The following people (according to their role at the time the programme took place) were interviewed:

- Staff of the e-Governance Academy – 1 interview;
- Estonian expert/consultant – 1 interview;
- Civil servant from the Estonian MFA – 1 interview;
- Deputy minister of education and science in Georgia – 1 interview;
- Staff of the Deer Leap Foundation – 6 interviews;
- Private sector stakeholder in Georgia – 1 interview;
- Teacher from Georgia – 2 interviews;
- Student from Georgia – 1 interview.

There are nine male and five female interviewees in the sample.

The respondents were asked to provide their personal opinions on a list of prepared questions, which varied a little based on their background and role in the Deer Leap programme. Often the conversations also covered additional questions and thereby provided me with useful contextual information to better understand how the intervention was implemented and perceived.

The opinions of the interviewees are presented anonymously. All data collected will only be used for the cause of this research. Each interviewee signed a form to verify their informed consent to take part in this study.

## **IV From Tiger Leap to Deer Leap**

In this chapter, I will describe the process of cooperation between Estonia and Georgia in the framework of the Deer Leap programme during the period of 2004-2008. The narrative covers all steps of the intervention from when the initial idea emerged until the end of the programme. The description is based on the data collected from programme materials as well as the interviews conducted with programme participants in Georgia and Estonia.

### **4.1. Developing the programme idea**

The transfer of the Tiger Leap programme from Estonia to Georgia started after the new government took office in Georgia after the Rose Revolution of 2004. The cooperation project with Georgia was one of the first projects for eGA, which was only founded in February 2003 and did not have a lot of real experience as a development organisation, yet. The board of eGA consisted of the Estonian MFA, Estonian Ministry of Economy, OSF Estonia and UNDP. Right after the Rose Revolution at one of the board meetings, the feeling was expressed that eGA should look into possibilities to work with Georgia. As eGA had a strategy of establishing focal points in different regions, Georgia seemed to be a good choice for the Caucasus. It was decided that Mr. Ivar Tallo, a staff member of eGA would go on a fact-finding mission to Georgia in the spring of 2004 to meet with local stakeholders and to map potential areas for cooperation. The board members of eGA pooled their resources to establish contacts with partners in Georgia. In this regard, an important point of entrance was OSF Georgia, who was reached out to by OSF Estonia. The Estonian MFA helped eGA to establish contacts with Americans in Georgia.

That first visit to Georgia was not very encouraging, because the initial stance of the Georgian stakeholders was quite resistant. Some claimed that they already know everything that Estonia or eGA would potentially have to offer to them in the e-governance sector. Other stakeholders thought that the ideas introduced by eGA would not be possible to implement in Georgia. Tallo had himself returned to Estonia in 1993 after years of living in Western countries, and said that the situation in Georgia in 2004 reminded him of how Estonia was like when he had returned to his home country. What

is more, as I described earlier, Internet penetration in Georgia was very low, infrastructure weak and the Internet-culture not strong, which means that the main channels of communication for the government were mobile phones. However, by using his diplomatic skills and effective networking, Tallo managed to arrange a meeting with the office of president Saakashvili, where the atmosphere was different. The eGA representative I interviewed explained that several people in the president's office, including Saakashvili himself, had lived abroad in Western countries and were more open to cooperate on modern issues such as e-governance. The interviewees from eGA also emphasised that another crucial supporter of the idea to take ICT to schools turned out to be Alexander Lomaia, the minister of education and science. Just as all other ministers, he was faced with the challenge of implementing a number of fundamental reforms and this one seemed reasonable for him. The Estonian interviewees that met with Lomaia during the Deer Leap programme said that he was a straightforward man who did not waste time on small details and focused on larger visions and ideas.

To summarize the visit, Tallo wrote a list with a few short-term and long-term e-governance solutions that could be applicable in Georgia. An interviewee from eGA summarised that this document had argued that in order to eventually establish e-governance tools, it is first necessary to create an environment where the population would see the need for it and then accept it. It suggested that Georgia should take a similar „Tiger Leap“ as Estonia did by connecting the population to the Internet and developing basic e-literacy skills, because increased computer literacy would quickly lead to many other e-services (banks, tax system etc.) being developed. It further suggested that implementing a school computerisation programme would be a great way to execute a nation-wide reform that would benefit the whole society not just a few oligarchs as had often happened before. Eventually, the new generation would be open to more democratic governance and active participation in societal affairs.

While these recommendations were available to all board members of eGA, the OSF and Estonian MFA were the ones that were most interested in taking them further. At that time the MFA did not support the project financially, yet, and eGA asked for support from the embassy of the United States in Estonia to establish a model for how eGA would facilitate the transfer of the Estonian experience with Tiger Leap to Georgia. In parallel, eGA organised study visits to Estonia for civil servants from various countries to see first-hand how the e-systems work in Estonia. After Tallo's first

visit to Georgia in early 2004, OSF Georgia provided him a local assistant to help with follow-up work. This person suggested to the MoES of Georgia that the government should go on one of eGA's study visits to learn about the ICT solutions that are used there in various sectors. OSF funded this visit to take place in 2004 and both Estonian and Georgian interviews confirmed that it was crucial in creating good personal and intergovernmental links between the two countries that would later lead to a joint activity. The delegation was introduced to various Estonian e-services like the ID card and the online tax declaration system. One of the most momentous meetings during the visit was to the TLF, where the Georgians were introduced to the ICT programme being implemented in Estonian schools.

One of the first directors of the DLF described in the interview that after the Georgian delegation's return home, the lessons learnt in Estonia were discussed by domestic stakeholders. At the outset, there was no particular focus on ICT in education and they were more generally interested in implementing the PRSP through means of e-governance, especially at the local government level. However, the Estonian experience with Tiger Leap was regarded as a truly successful example of technological innovation and the minister of education as well as the president quickly decided to implement a similar programme in Georgia. The interviewee guessed that the fact that the former Estonian prime minister Mart Laar was the adviser of Saakashvili likely also played some a role in creating a positive image for this programme and Estonia as a partner country among the politicians.

Since both Estonians and Georgians were eager to cooperate with each other, a joint project was swiftly initiated with the financial support of international donors like OSF and the World Bank. The official kick-off conference of the Deer Leap programme took place in Tbilisi in March 2005. The event was opened by the freshly elected President Mikheil Saakashvili and it received a significant amount of attention from the Georgian media. The Estonian and Georgian interviewees who participated at the conference described in detail their memories of the event that took place in very poor conditions, without electricity or heating. Around the time of the conference, a development cooperation project funded by the Estonian MFA started. In the framework of this project, the first Master Plan was written for the Tiger Leap in Georgia. The first draft of the programme, which was later called Deer Leap, was



written by the staff of eGA in close cooperation with Estonian educational experts Mart Laanpere and Hannes Voolma.

As the last point, I should mention the close personal relations between people that also played a role in establishing eGA and more specifically in starting the project with Georgia. Since Estonia is a small country, people are very well networked and know each other. For example, prior starting working at eGA, Tallo had worked as the foreign policy advisor to the Estonian president and served as a member of the parliament, which meant that he had good relations with the Estonian MFA and credibility in international affairs. Therefore, when he advised the MFA that Estonia should see itself as a subject of international policy rather than the object, his counsel did not fall on deaf ears. The interviewees from Estonia confirmed that Tallo's his party affiliation did not influence the ministry, but that the fact that he knew people at the MFA was useful. Anyhow, while it is difficult to determine exactly the role each individual played in the Deer Leap programme, it is certain that some key people undeniably had quite a considerable impact.

#### **4.2. Description of the programme**

While Tiger Leap and Deer Leap share many similarities, the Georgian programme was not a copy-and-paste model of the Tiger Leap. At the start of the cooperation, Estonians presented their experience with the Tiger Leap, which had been running for four years. The vision of the programme was written based on numerous consultations and was based on the SWOT analysis written after conducting a situation mapping and a strategy seminar in Georgia in September and November of 2004. After the analysis, a draft for the Master Plan for Deer Leap was written. Many people from Georgia were involved, but the most important leader from their side was Bela Tsipuria, deputy minister of the MoES. Nearly all stakeholders participated in the primary consultations and the mapping phase, including teachers, IT specialists and software developers. All together around 20 people, mostly Georgian, were involved in the programme planning. eGA was the main coordinator of the experts from the Estonian side and the Georgian MoES organised the stakeholders from their end. An interviewee from eGA explained that the primary goal of the first planning phase was to craft the structure and principles of the programme in order to gain political support for the programme.

The situation mapping (Laanpere, 2005a, Appx. 2) revealed that in the academic year of 2003/2004 there were a total of 3 134 schools in Georgia, including approximately 650 000 students and 70 200 teachers. Vast majority of the schools were located in the rural regions, but around 23 percent of all students went to school in the capital city Tbilisi and 18 percent of the teachers worked there. The distribution of computers in schools was also unequal with approximately half of the technology being in Tbilisi, but most of them were second-hand and outdated. Internet connection in the schools was rare and in most cases the speed was very low (33 Kbps) while the cost was high – prices for low-level Internet services were sometimes up to 20 times higher than in the EU. Even though informatics was a compulsory subject in all secondary schools, the content of this subject in most cases focused only on programming languages and was frequently taught without computers using only a blackboard and paper. ICT was hardly ever used in other subjects or in the school management.

The Master Plan notes (Laanpere, 2005a, Ch. 1.2.2.-1.2.6.) that the overall educational infrastructure was quite poor as only 49 percent of school building were in satisfactory condition whereas the rest needed substantial repairs, and there were major problems with electrical supply. The teacher's qualifications were also outdated and insufficient to provide good quality education. In terms of administration, the Master Plan criticised the highly centralised Soviet style of government as well as the lack of transparency and high corruption, but suggested that modern ICT solutions can contribute to improving the situation by providing reliable communication channels. The parents and communities were not involved in school activities and the Master Plan envisioned the computer labs to be open to the public after school hours, so that everyone could use the available resources to pursue their personal self-directed exploratory work.

The Master Plan for the reform declared the main aim of the programme to be computerising schools in Georgia to bring about educational, economic and societal modernisation of Georgia in line with the conclusions of the PRSP approved by the Georgian government (Laanpere, 2005a). In the long term, it was expected that through these improvements it will be possible to also broaden the educational focus and promote new ways of learning, broaden the social focus of school education by making more inclusionary, address national policy concerns regarding ethnic minorities, support regional development and community building, and increase the competitiveness of the

Georgian youth on the global labour market. The specific expected outcomes were the following (ibid.):

- ICT infrastructure reaches all regions and communities through schools;
- ICT is integrated into the national curriculum;
- Educational software and services are developed;
- Project-based learning and other new teaching methods that involve ICT are introduced to students and teachers (professional development);
- Enhanced community involvement in education through ICT-based community education projects.

The goals of Deer Leap were largely the same as those of Tiger Leap, but the first four years of the Estonian programme's achievements were modified to take place in Georgia in three years.

In terms of the working process and decision making, the Master Plan expected the implementation to be based on the following principles (Laanpere, 2005a):

- Fairness of the process – initiative from schools and communities;
- Transparent management – clear and transparent selection procedures, public accountability at all levels;
- Combining top-down and bottom-up innovation – developing the network of exemplary pilot schools and supporting grassroots-level initiatives;
- Connection to school improvement/school-based strategic planning, as well as to regional/district strategies;
- Harmonising with other reform programmes in education;
- Network of networks – project-based financing, multiple projects interconnected;
- Attracting private resources to education by establishing business partnerships;
- Regular monitoring and evaluation as a basis for steering the innovation process.

In Estonia, the Tiger Leap Foundation was a legal person under private law. The Ministry of Education was among the 30 founding members of that foundation, which means that while the foundation was an independent legal person, the government still had an influence on the decision-making process of the foundation and it was one of the main funders of the organisation. In Georgia, three legal forms were considered for implementing their programme: establishing a government agency by the Georgian MoES, establishing a private company, and establishing a non-profit foundation with

the involvement of the MoES, which retains majority voting rights on its governing board. Initially, the Georgian government preferred the first option, but a former director of DFL remembered that it was eGA who strongly pushed for following the Estonian model in order to guarantee the necessary level of independence in decision-making for the organisation. Some Estonians even travelled to Georgia to defend their opinion in front of the minister of education of Georgia. Their main argument was that the programme should not be political and ought to be able to continue even if the leadership of the ministry changed. Eventually, they convinced the minister and the Deer Leap Foundation (DLF) was created as a semi-independent entity under public law. The foundation was accountable to the MoES, but was allowed to generate profit and had enough managerial independence. Stakeholders from other ministries, international organisations, universities, local well-established non-governmental organisations, associations of municipalities, and Georgian as well as international businesses were involved as founders to contribute financially and with expertise to the strategies and actions of the programme. The strategic decisions were made by a governing board and the management of the programme was overseen by the director of the foundation.

The Deer Leap programme was implemented in two phases: a pilot phase in 2005-2006 and an extension phase in 2007-2008. During the pilot phase, a small number of schools were equipped with modern computer labs with 12-15 student computers, some other technology and Internet connection with the speed of at least 128 Kbps. The programme was implemented in a cascade system, where initially only the pilot schools received fully equipped computer labs, while other neighbouring schools would receive only some computers. In each pilot school, at least five teachers were trained to become teacher trainers with a mission to provide ICT courses for other teachers in their own school and other schools in the region. The pilot schools functioned as support and training centres for teachers in the nearby schools, which would receive full equipment after completing the training programme. In order to maintain quality control for this type of teacher training, the courses followed centrally developed content, materials and curriculum. (Pata et al., 2008)

On average, the schools were provided with three computers for teachers and administration, 12 computers for students, LAN or WiFi connection, two laser printers, one data projector and one multimedia projector, one multifunctional printer-scanner-

copier, one digital camera along with some accessories and of course software to go with the technology and maintenance service . The approximate cost of equipping one school was 18 000 US dollars and the programme included all schools in all the regions of the country. (Laanpere, 2005a) Between the years 2005 and 2008, more than 26 500 computers were provided to schools increasing the average pupil-to-computer ratio from 250:1 to 22:1. In addition, Internet connection was provided for over 300 schools, which created access to Internet at school for 60 percent of all primary and secondary students. Approximately 30 percent of all teachers across the country participated in introductory-level computer literacy courses and most schools hired IT managers. Furthermore, numerous various digital learning materials were created. (Pata et al., 2008)

An important element of Tiger Leap that was different in Georgia in comparison to Estonia was using open source software instead of Microsoft products. Estonians advised to use open source software, because their own experience proved that while Microsoft initially offered their software to schools at very low rates, the prices increased significantly after some time and proved to be too expensive. In 2005, there was no Microsoft representation in Tbilisi and the country was covered by the Moscow office. The beginning price that MS offered was too high for the Georgians, so serious debates were held about, which software to use. Eventually, the decision was made to use the open source software Linux. Still, there was pressure from the U.S. embassy in Georgia and of later Microsoft to use their services instead and in 2008 the government did introduce the commercial software and moved to a dual system.

While providing the technical equipment was a central element of the programme, many other capacity building activities took place in the schools and for the public. The Master Plan of the programme stated the following main activity lines (Laanpere, 2005a):

- Organising training of trainers for school informatics teachers, subject teachers and school administrators in ICT and community education.
- Methodological support for school-based teacher training in ICT-based methods and organising grant competitions for conducting training in schools.
- Organising grant competitions for all schools for purchasing and introducing computers in learning and teaching and for community projects.

- Organising the development and production of original educational software, digital learning materials and learning aids.
- Launching and maintaining an educational portal, which provides various information services to schools for free: news, digital learning materials, free educational software, legal/pedagogical/technical advice, discussion forums, best practice cases, research reports, etc.
- Organising annual conferences for sharing best practice.
- Organising public awareness campaigns on the topics of ICT in learning and community development.
- Fundraising for dissemination of the pilot experiences and expanding the programme.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the programme by external bodies.

The projects funded by the Estonian MFA added the elements of teacher and student exchanges between Estonia and Georgia.

An important part of the programme was the extremely popular subject-specific (i.e. physics, chemistry, literature) competitions organised by the DLF. The students had to collect and create written and audio-visual materials, which were submitted to an online database. Prizes for the best schools included a telescope, laptop computers, books and other such goods. The Georgian interviewees from the DLF staff remember the competitions as an initiative that their team came up with, but the Estonian expert involved in the programme contends that they got the initial idea from him. Either way, the way the competitions turned out was considered more successful in Georgia than they in Estonia.

Student and teacher exchanges with Estonian schools were also a popular element of the Deer Leap. For example, teachers from the Estonian school in Kolga organised exchanges with a Georgian school in Gori. DLF staff members mentioned in the interviews that teacher had told them that they liked that the selection process for participants was transparent and there was no corruption. It was an especially great opportunity for teachers from rural areas to get new experiences and opportunities for professional development. The interviewees said that teachers appreciated that their contribution was noticed and valued. The programme motivated the teachers to improve their skills and contributed to a development of a more modern educational system. The programme also led to creating a common teacher's resource-sharing platform in a

Georgian server that was meant for both Georgian and Estonian teachers, but was much more actively used by the former. Many of the active teachers, who participated in the Deer Leap, continue to enthusiastically take part in other ICT related activities even today.

The total budget of the Deer Leap programme projected in the Master Plan for the years 2005-2008 was nearly 29 million US dollars, which was mostly covered by the national budget of Georgia and partially by private donors (7.8 million US dollars). Approximately 40 percent of the budget was spent on buying computers, 10 percent on connectivity expansion and Internet service, 10 percent on software, 20 percent on both teacher trainings and on technical support, and small proportions on personnel, public relations and office cost as well as on educational Internet projects, conferences, publications, audits and transportation. (Pata et al., 2008) The Estonian contribution was covered the cost of the Estonian experts and the study visits and trainings that took place for teachers and other beneficiaries. The beginning phase of the cooperation was quite demanding and implemented with very small funds. An interviewee from eGA remembered anecdotal instances when Estonian experts had to travel to Tbilisi with their personal frequent flyer miles in order to work with the partners there. It was the opinion of that interviewee that more support from donors would have made the cooperation significantly smoother and faster.

Private sector participated in the programme primarily as a service provider in hardware purchases and building Internet connections. Naturally, such big national contracts were good business for the companies. It was also marked by a former DLF staff member and the representative of the Georgian government that, in the beginning, some Georgian IT companies were upset that foreign computers were purchased instead of domestic ones. The MoES representative explained that the local companies did not have the capacity to provide a sufficient number of computers for the whole country.

#### **4.3. Termination of the programme**

The first phase of Deer Leap was planned until the end of 2008 and the original Master Plan set out to continue for a period of another five years from 2009 to 2013. However, at the end of the first programme period, fierce discussions emerged on the future of the programme as the government proposed a complete restructuring of the DLF. To substantiate the discussions about closing the organisation, the DLF team

together with the Estonian expert Mart Laanpere drafted a new plan titled “Deer Leap Plus 2009-2012,” which was based on consultation with various stakeholders in Georgia in June 2008. The new plan expanded the scope of actions from primary and secondary schools to all teacher training institutions in order to further develop and integrate ICT into classroom and extra-curricular activities. The main achievements of the first phase of the programme were considered to be the infrastructure developments in schools, teacher trainings, developing digital learning sources and conducting educational projects, hiring IT managers to schools for administration and support, creating public awareness of the programme, and also introducing laptops to students. Among the remaining challenges were the following: insufficient Internet connectivity in schools, pressure to change from an open-source platform to a Microsoft-based one, quality assurance of the teacher training, need for more digital learning resources, reliable monitoring of programme activities, development of information management systems for the schools and for the MoES, staff turnover in DLF as well as technophobia among teachers. The new master plan attempted to strike a balance between centralisation/decentralisation in decision making, regulation/deregulation of activities, specialisation/integration of stakeholders, and targeting innovators vs. the widest possible audience. The plan foresaw three sub-programmes coordinated by the DLF: ICT infrastructure, teacher training and Digital Learning Resources programmes. (Laanpere, 2008)

To defend their vision, the board of the DLF also asked the Estonian expert to list ten reasons, why the integrity of the organisation ought to be maintained. As a passionate believer in the programme, he assembled the following arguments in support of implementing the Deer Leap Plus (Laanpere, 2008):

- 1) Success story – unlike many other national projects to introduce ICT in education, Deer Leap despite its minor failures was successful in systematically developing both the infrastructure and building teacher’s capacity to use the new technology.
- 2) Effectiveness – if the DLF would be broken down, the new (scattered) structural units would need at least 1-2 years before they can start to work on the same level of effectiveness as the DLF.



- 3) Common language – it makes work easier and more effective if curriculum/ pedagogical experts and technical specialists work side by side in one organisation.
- 4) Synergy – the best results can be achieved when people working on ICT infrastructure, content and services, educational technology competencies of teachers and students, curriculum integration, administration and support, dissemination and networking all work in close cooperation.
- 5) Integration with curriculum reform – experience from other countries shows that integration of the ICT innovation into general curriculum reform works better if there is a strong institutional partner to take the lead.
- 6) The ownership of change – the “everybody is responsible” approach to implementing the national ICT integration strategy for schools would likely lead to failure without clearly defined leadership.
- 7) Expertise – the breakdown of DLF would lead to losing the expertise of key DLF personnel, who were already looking for new jobs.
- 8) Timing – while eventually the ICT-related tasks should be integrated into other organisational structures, at the time the process of passing over the responsibilities was not gradual, incremental or planned well enough.
- 9) Persons – in case of problems with organisational management, the solution should be directly addressing the unsatisfying employees not restructuring the whole foundation.
- 10) Brand – Deer Leap as a highly valued and well-known brand in the Georgian society and no institution in the new structure could own/carry on this brand.

Laanpere even travelled to Tbilisi to defend these arguments in front of the MoES and wrote letters of appeal from his personal will. However, one interviewee who was related to the restructuring process expressed the opinion that as Laanpere was no longer an unknown foreign expert and had formed various connections to many people in Georgia, and the government representatives perceived him to be subjective and refused to take his pleas into account.

What is more, in 2007 the Georgian MoES together with the World Bank commissioned an evaluation of the eight biggest educational reforms in the country. One of the study objects of this report was the Deer Leap programme, particularly the ICT training for teacher. The evaluation concluded that the programme had “shown

adaptability and a delivery model that appears to have a high probability of broad, if not deep, success” (Shapiro et al, 2007, vii). However, the analysis confirmed the estimation of the Deer Leap team that while many teachers were knowledgeable about using computers, most of them still rarely or never used them in the teaching process to achieve educational results. The report goes on to say that in-depth trainings for a limited number of teachers or distance learning methods proposed by the DLF would probably not be able to meet the high demand for better training and that instead of digital materials there is a need for as many hard copies of support and training materials for teachers as possible (ibid, vii and ix).

Eventually, despite the strong opposition from both the DLF team and the Estonian expert, the government executed its restructuring plan and merged Deer Leap with the general school infrastructure reform. The DLF was neglected and the programme divided among three different units in the MoES. The Educational and Scientific Infrastructure Development Agency (ESIDA) was established in January 2009 and it became primarily responsible for building and renovating schools, including delivering computer technology even though in smaller numbers compared to Deer Leap. Teacher training was transferred to the National Center for Teacher Professional Development. Issues related to connectivity were delegated to the Educational Management Information System. The curriculum content development regarding using ICT in classrooms was effectively neglected at this stage. Nearly all former DLF staff members explained in the interviews that in the new governmental understanding Deer Leap was more an infrastructure project than a pedagogy programme. “Since 2008, it was not so much the format of the programme that was changed, but the spirit of it,” described one of the interviewees from Georgia that had been heavily involved in the initial planning phase of the programme. She explained that classroom activities using ICT were no longer actively encouraged as the system was centralised and there was less room for local initiatives, which had been one of the Estonian suggestions that had previously been eagerly followed. An Estonian interviewee expressed the opinion that the new people in the MoES simply were not able to understand the importance of the integrated approach that was previously been used.

A new element of computerising the schools that was added to the Deer Leap programme by the government in 2008 and continued later was the presidential programme My First Computer. In the first year, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders from public and

private schools with good study results during the past three were given a total of 8 035 personal laptops. During the second year, additional 3 212 laptops were handed out. The objective of this programme was to expand the educational benefits of the Deer Leap by creating even better access to modern technologies and thus supporting “poverty alleviation and the development of competitive economic possibilities.” (ESIDA, 2014) More than that, the president initiated another programme called “Buki” in September 2010, which started providing all first-graders with personal notebooks. The programme website declares that ICT and the Internet are essential for raising good citizens, who will use modern technologies in the future. On top of that, it is believed that incorporating the netbooks into the national curriculum and school programmes will encourage children to use computers and the Internet for finding new information as well as offer an opportunity to acquire additional literature for the students. (MoES of Georgia, 2010) One interviewee described these projects as a weak replica of the original Deer Leap programme, because there was too much focus on handing out the technology and not enough focus on teacher training. He pointed out that during the first two years, the personal devices were only given to the students and not the teachers, which meant that the teachers could not assist the students or effectively use the technology in their classrooms. Eventually the government realised that they also need to provide these computers to the teachers and the situation improved after that.

Even though the DLF in its previous form was dismantled, some of the work was continued. The DLF team proposed an element of professional development of teachers and the content of teaching as part of the Deer Leap Plus. Their idea was initially rejected, but later implemented through the National Center for Teacher Professional Development, and the former technology-based trainings were replaced with those focusing on pedagogy and the new media. The new training system was primarily based on a programme from the State of Georgia in the United States, but the Estonian expert Mart Laanpere remained involved in the process.

The interviews revealed that one of the major reasons for terminating the DLF in its old form were the shifts in Georgian domestic political situation that started already in 2007 when public protests called for an early presidential election. The elections resulted in some changes in the government, including replacing Alexander Lomaia, minister of education and science in November 2007 with Maia Miminoshvili, who stayed in the position for three months. From the end of January 2008 until the middle

of December 2008, the minister's position was held by Ghia Nodia, who was followed by Nika Gvaramia until December 2009, and then by Dimitri Shashkini. Furthermore, in 2008 Georgia had a war with Russia, which also impacted the programme. One Estonian expert said that the loss of motivation after the war was evident, but that the main change still happened when minister Lomaia was replaced. The representative of the MoES of Georgia also believed that the changes were mainly caused by political shifts. Lomaia had been a strong supporter of the programme from the beginning and understood its deeper objectives. Both Estonian and Georgian interviewees described Dimitri Shashkini, the minister in office when the restructuring of Deer Leap was happening as a forceful leader who wanted to do things his own way and not follow his predecessors' steps. A couple of interviewees from the DLF staff and from the MoES as well as the Estonian experts are convinced that the programme was ended due to Georgian domestic political rivalry not because the programme was malfunctioning or not successful enough. At this point it is necessary to mark that it is possible that my sources are biased, because the interviewees' sample does not include anyone from the governments that stepped into the office after Alexander Lomaia. It is likely that they would offer a different explanation of why the DLF was closed. Still, considering that a few of the former DLF staff that I interviewed continued to work in the educational sector after the 2008, I have confidence in their experience and opinions and have the feeling that political rivalries did play an important role in this decision.

At the same time, other former DLF staff members confessed in interviews that it is still unclear to them why exactly the programme was ended. Analysing the reasons for the major shift in the way Deer Leap was managed, they believe that a potential problem was that the DLF was not well linked to other educational institutions under the MoES. In some cases, they noticed unwillingness to cooperate, because the organisations were perceived to be competitors for attention, funding, etc. There were also many redundancies, because each organisation had their own system and web portals and there was too little coordination from the government. Considering these arguments, it is understandable, why the government implemented an overall reorganisation of the educational institutions.

Another factor that could have affected the government's attitude towards the Deer Leap programme was the financial crises. While originally the governmental funding for the programme for the period of 2007-2011 was set at around 28 million US

dollars, then the actual budget for the programme decreased to approximately 21 US dollars (Chitanava, 2011, 13). Based on the information I have, it is difficult to conclude whether the decrease in funding was caused by the shortage of resources because of the crisis or because the restructuring simply made the program cheaper for the government. On the one hand, considering that the government cut funding for the rehabilitation of public schools by about 85% during the period of 2008-2009 (ibid., 82), it is probable that the government was under budgetary stress and that this affected the decision to terminate the Deer Leap in its current form. On the other hand, the fact that the government did find finances for supporting the My First Computer and Buki programmes suggests that money was not the number one reason for changes.

Last but not least, the DLF staff members were themselves divided. After several managerial shifts, the last director of DLF attempted to solve the managerial crises of the foundation, but since the staff was not used to strong leadership and her style of working, it was not easy to come to a common position. There were principal disagreements between the staff members. The Estonian expert also noted that some staff members had become more tightly related to political actors, which might have contributed to the tensions. Neither the director's nor Estonians' mediation was able to unify the organisation and this was also one of the reasons, why the DLF was not able to convincingly justify to the MoES, why the Deer Leap programme should continue in its old format.

## **V Impact of the programme**

In this chapter, I will present my analysis of the data collected primarily through the interviews, but also by looking at reports and other secondary data about the Deer Leap programme. I will start by scrutinising the programme's impact in terms of the three indicators that I outlined in Chapter 3.2. After that I will look at the more substantial impact on democratisation that has been identified as a major goal of Deer Leap. Finally, I will examine what was the unique added value of the Estonian intervention in Georgia.

### **5.1. Effectiveness of the intervention**

#### **5.1.2. *Relevance***

The eGA team from Estonia explained in the interviews that they paid special attention to explicitly linking the Master Plan for Deer Leap to the PRSP of Georgia, which suggests that the programme was fully aligned with the recipient country's needs. The document makes numerous references to the goals stated in the PRSP, including to the declaration that the goal of the educational system is to prepare the young generations for the rapidly changing modern society, and that in order "to enhance the quality of education, it is necessary to introduce new technologies, equip educational institutes and renovate buildings" (IMF, 2003, 46-47). In fact, all interviewees from Estonia as well as several from DLF staff are convinced that initiating the programme was mainly possible because the new government of Georgia was exceptionally open to innovative technological solutions. They said that the Georgian government wanted rapid developments and aspired to create a new and modern identity for Georgia. The desire to move towards the Western world was a significant driver of the new leadership.

One interviewee from the DLF management noted that central planning and across-the-board agreements are not characteristic of Georgian reforms, but in the case of Deer Leap it was considered fairly successful. However, he specified that the Georgian government did not really fully follow the PRSP in all aspects. The most notable reforms that were actually implemented were those of the educational sector and

within the police system. The interviewee holds that the PRSP was essentially an empty promise of president Shevardnadze to win the elections; post-elections priorities and reforms were strongly based on the personal interests and beliefs of the new high officials and politicians. He judged the inclusion of stakeholders to the larger reform process as very limited and not transparent. The staff members of DLF that were not directly involved in planning the Deer Leap in the beginning did not comment on the PRSP, because it was not a topic that came up in their work.

In term of the relevance of the action to the wider public in Georgia, it should be explained that eGA emphasized to its Georgian partners from the start that the programme should be seen as an opportunity to reach out the population. In order to do so, they recommended generating publicity for the programme to explain its benefits to the people. The representative of the Georgian MoES and the managers of the DLF agree that it was quite easy for the government to gain public support for implementing the programme. The new government had gained trust by already having implemented some reforms in the educational sector as a part of its westernization efforts. One of the first reforms had been introducing the intra-university examinations system for university admission, which replaced the previous highly corrupt system that was based on nepotism and bribery. This reform was warmly welcomed by the public, because it enabled merit-based access to higher education for all students. In general, the interviewees from Georgia believed that this successful reform gave the government credit and allowed the president to use it as a positive public relations tool to justify future reforms such as the Deer Leap programme. Unfortunately, I was not able to find a comprehensive public opinion survey to fully know whether the society actually welcomed the programme. However, all of the people I interviewed believed that the target groups were happy to have had a chance to participate in the programme.

Still, in the beginning, there was a slight discrepancy between how necessary the programme was perceived to be by the leadership of Georgia and by the people working in schools. While the government saw the Deer Leap programme as a means to develop the human resources of the country and boost the economy by using modern ICT solutions, many teachers did not understand the usefulness of it all. The Estonian expert described it as a cultural shock to many teachers. The Deer Leap team members from Estonia and Georgia had to do a lot of explanatory work to explain the concept of the programme. It was difficult to convince the old-school educators that instead of

programming lessons they should focus on incorporating the ICT into general education in all subjects. Furthermore, the Estonian expert maintained that the many of the Georgian beneficiaries did not see the connection between using computers for learning and economic progress. Thinking of the Internet as a human right, like the Estonians did, was even more incomprehensible. He believes that a shift in the mind-set took place only after the Georgians saw by themselves what Estonia had achieved with e-governance, paperless bureaucratic processes and transparency.

What is more, the DLF staff member responsible for working directly with the teachers pointed out that when schools received the new technology, there was resistance from teachers to start utilising it as they lacked sufficient skills and courage to employ the new expensive tools in daily classroom activities. The interviewee said that, in the beginning, the application of the new technology was really quite problematical in many schools. For example, not all schools had ICT managers, which caused problems when computers broke down. The technical and administrative problems disrupted the classroom atmosphere and it was not convenient or constructive for teachers. A former DLF director further mentioned that the teachers were working with very low salaries and believed that the money spent on Deer Leap should better be used for raising salaries or fixing the deteriorating school buildings. Both interviewees still concluded that when the initial technological problems were solved, the beneficiaries were fairly eager to participate in the programme.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the programme were the students. Nearly all Georgian interviewees said that the reactions of the students, particularly in remote areas, were generally positive towards the initiative. A staff member of the DLF described that, in the beginning, people did not believe that the programme would actually expand to all schools across the country, and that they were sincerely excited when they saw the computers at their schools. For most students and teachers, this was the first experience with computers, because just like in Estonia at the time of starting Tiger Leap, Georgia had practically no computers or Internet access in schools or anywhere else in the country before. These types of situations were especially common in the poor rural mountainous regions. The representative of the MoES remembered an incident when high politicians visited a small school in a mountainous village and asked the students to send them an email later – much to their delight, they received a lot of



electronic letters after that, which was a sign that the students were enjoying using the opportunities ICT provided.

In practical terms, the programme was brought closer to the people by communicating in Russian when necessary. This was particularly helpful for teachers, who often did not speak English. The participants also found a “common language” on the personal level and it was irrefutably evident that the strong connections at all levels (politicians, civil servants, teachers, students) played a significant role in the project. Interviewees from both Estonia and Georgia described the personal friendships they had formed with their project partners.

As I described in Chapter 3.3.1, relevance of the intervention must also be evaluated based on how well the action was coordinated with other donors. The interviewee from the Estonian MFA said that they also consulted with other donors when deciding on the thematic sectors of cooperation, but no significant opportunities were identified. The Estonian expertise in the e-governance and societal transitions was not something that other donors shared. The interviewee further explained that Estonia considered it imperative to offer political and developmental support for the democratisation and modernisation of Georgia after the Rose Revolution. Thus, it is clear that duplication was not a problem and that the Estonian intervention was sharply focused on filling a specific need of Georgia. Also, following the description of Estonian development cooperation policy and its logic of giving assistance that was described in Chapter 1.5, it is evident that the intervention in Georgia was also aligned with the priorities of Estonia as a donor country.

### ***5.1.3. Ownership***

As I explained in Chapter 3.3.2, there is a debate going on about the definition of the concept of ownership and much of the current writing about ownership is donor-centred. My aim is to offer a voice to the both the donors and recipient side partners of the Deer Leap intervention to analyse how the concept was enforced.

To put it briefly, all of the respondents were in agreement that Georgians had ownership of the cooperation process. Even though the Master Plan was physically drafted by the Estonians, it was strongly based on the needs of Georgia. The Estonian expert explained that drafts of the Master Plan were constantly sent for commenting to the Georgians, but they did not receive much feedback through this channel. Instead, the

a situation mapping was conducted and strategy seminars held with stakeholders in Georgia. The Estonian model was analysed together with the Georgian counterparts and adapted to the local circumstances and needs. “We were independent when planning the programme,” confirmed one of the early directors of the DLF. The management of the DLF was strictly in the hands of Georgians. At the beginning, it was proposed that the programme should be led by a well-known public figure. Both Georgian and Estonian candidates were proposed for the job, but the idea was eventually rejected by Georgians due to the post-Rose Revolution sentiments of taking leadership of the country into local hands.

An Estonian expert who participated in writing the Master Plan and implementing trainings in Georgia strongly believes that the Georgian partners from the MoES and from the DLF took strong ownership of the whole process from the beginning. He said in the interview that it was a principal question for him, because personal experience from implementing national programmes in Estonia had taught that this is the only way to guarantee sustainability. One Estonian interviewee also said in a kindly joking manner that the reason why Estonians had to write the Master Plan was that long-term planning is simply “not in the nature of Georgians.” This assessment contradicts the general opinion expressed in other parts of the interview (and by other interviewees) that Estonians and Georgians are culturally close. However, in my view, the interviewees generally seemed to understand cultural similarity in terms of a similar historical experiences, common traits in thinking that were inherited from the Soviet times, and as the ease of personal-level communication. The “nature of Georgians” was not mentioned by other interviewees, but an analysis of the importance of identity, innate nature and culture of both Estonians and Georgians in this cooperation project would perhaps be worth examining in future studies by historians, anthropologists, psychologist or other experts.

On the negative side, it must be mentioned that while a few teachers and schools administrators participated in the strategy seminars during the initial planning phase of the programme, no students or community members were invited. The situation improved during the active implementation period when the opinions of all the beneficiaries were taken into consideration by the DLF staff, who had daily contact with them and were making efforts to adjust their activities to the needs of schools, teachers and students. A staff member of eGA explained that students were not included in the

first planning phase, because the main aim was to gain political support for the programme and they did not see a point including students at this stage. The interviewee stressed that students and teachers were actively involved in later stages.

More evidence for the fact that the Georgian side had ownership of the decisions concerning the Deer Leap programme is how the name of the programme was chosen. At first, it was proposed by Estonians that the Georgian programme should also be called Tiger Leap. However, the Georgians believed that it would not suit their cultural context and decided to change it to Deer Leap (in Georgian: *irmis nakhtomi*), which means Milky Way in Georgian and is a positive known symbol for Georgians. Both Estonian and Georgian interviewees agreed that the name change was acknowledged by all stakeholders and did not cause friction between the partners. A former DLF director pointed out that using the Tiger Leap name could have been useful for Estonia in terms of “selling” the popular brand name programme to other countries, but this opportunity was not pursued. An interviewee from eGA and the educational expert from Estonia both agreed that this was not a big thing in their opinion and the main thing was to spread the larger vision of ICT in education based on the Estonian good example. However, all the interviewees from Estonia confirmed that Estonia was building an image of a successful e-country and the Deer Leap project was one way to do this. A former manager of the DLF and a couple of staff members also conceded that it was likely an underlying objective for Estonia. This approach was considered natural and something to be expected; no-one gave a negative assessment to this motivation of Estonia. Still, on the practical project level, this was not considered to have been a very important factor.

In terms of finances, the Georgian government also had ownership of the Deer Leap programme. Since the Georgian government was determined to reform the country and adopt new technologies, the Deer Leap programme, unlike most other educational reforms, was funded directly from the national budget. In addition, the undertaking also received a large donation from a private philanthropist. Plus, it was motivating for the MoES to know that the costs of the Estonian (and some Georgian) partners were funded by the Estonian government and that the assistance would not be a further strain on their budget. The Estonian contribution did not cost anything for the Georgian government and copying the Tiger Leap programme was basically an inexpensive ready-made solution for the Georgian government that could be adopted fast. In fact, the Georgian

MoES representative believes that the benefits of working with Estonia were so evident and desired that they would still have used the Estonian expertise even if the Estonian government would not have paid for the Estonian participation, even though the scope of the cooperation would likely have been smaller (less teacher visits, etc). Since there was enough domestic funding for this programme, there was no need to turn to other wealthier donor countries and it was possible to work with Estonia, whose financial contribution could otherwise never compare with bigger donors. For Georgians, the most important benefit was the technical assistance (know-how from personal experience) and support from the Estonian side – not the money.

As I explained in Chapter 3.3.2, it has sometimes been reported that donors of development assistance are not effective in the personnel choice by preferring the more expensive external experts. In the case of Deer Leap, this did not seem to be a problem. As I mentioned, the management of the DLF was solely at the hands of Georgian people and external experts were only used for sharing the Estonian experience – this could not have been done by Georgian people anyway. Furthermore, as described in Chapter 4, the programme was implemented in a cascade system and the teachers who had participated in trainings became multipliers of knowledge for their colleagues. Thus, it is safe to say that the donor side of the cooperation project did not put unnecessary stress on the budget and the Georgian side was in charge of deciding how resources are allocated.

An interesting finding of my research is that the foreign experts were used for making other domestic reforms in Georgia. For example, one of the experts was asked to write an opinion on closing a unit of the MoES that was responsible for IT management. The unit with a staff of approximately 70 people was clearly obsolete as there were practically no computers in the country that they could take care of information systems that they could manage. While making the governance more efficient was a goal of the PRSP, it was easier for the Georgians to justify closing this unit with moral support from external experts. In my view, this can be considered a sign that the Georgian MoES took ownership of the whole educational reform process and used all available means to achieve the declared goals.

As a final point, the dismantling of the rather successful Deer Leap programme raises the question of accountability – who is responsible for achieving development results and guaranteeing their sustainability? In this case, the Estonian organisation eGA

was formally only responsible towards the funders of their projects, including the Estonian MFA, and did not have to report to the Georgian government or public. The Estonian MFA was interested in warm political relations with Georgia and supported the project while really only being accountable to the Estonian taxpayers. There was no formal mechanism that would make the Estonian MFA accountable to the final beneficiaries in Georgia. The real responsibility to produce results rested on the Georgian government as the “owner” of the Deer Leap programme.

#### ***5.1.5. Sustainability***

Ownership and relevance are the guarantees for sustainability and for having a positive lasting impact. The biggest goal of the Deer Leap programme was to bring about educational, economic and societal modernisation of Georgia. The Master Plan for Georgian school computerisation stated that the sustainability of the programme will be ensured through creating the technical, institutional and professional capacity for providing Internet connectivity to schools, developing ICT-based learning aids, establishing a framework for school-based professional development, and introducing project-based financing procedures and clear accountability (Laanpere, 2005a). However, the Master Plan does not fully explain how these activities will guarantee that the effects of the programme will continue in the long term.

As I explained in Chapter 4.3, the DLF was dismantled in 2009 and its tasks divided between different institutions under the MoES. On the one hand, this means that the integrated approach of combining ICT infrastructure development and teacher training was not sustained. On the other hand, different elements of the programme were continued in some form, which means that the effort of the DLF was not wasted. However, the most important indicator of sustainability is not whether the DLF remained but whether the actual results of the activity live on and here we have a positive answer.

The statistical report of the Deer Leap programme’s outputs was presented in Chapter 4, and it is possible to conclude that the expected outputs in terms of computers and teacher trainings were achieved. The programme goals of distributing computers and providing Internet were achieved and these material benefits will not disappear. However, a survey of the school principals, ICT managers and teachers (Pata et al., 2008) indicated that a continuation of the Deer Leap programme for at least another four

years is inevitably needed in order to reach the overall goals of modernisation and to have a sustainable impact. The report identified the following urgent needs:

- All schools need at least 128 Kbps Internet access to achieve real impact of ICT in teaching and learning;
- Access to computers in schools should be guaranteed to all teachers and pupils: computer labs should be open after lessons, some computers should be placed in public rooms outside computer labs (e.g. school library) and teachers' room so they could be used independently of the computer lab schedule;
- In the context of recent agreement with Microsoft, legal copies of MS Windows and MS Office should be installed on school computers (on the request by any school) as this software seems to be more familiar for teachers;
- Improvement of technical and administrative support to integration of ICT into everyday teaching and learning activities in schools: this included massive training of IT managers (specializing on educational technology, not purely technical skills), online helpdesks on school and national levels, printed guidelines, templates, policies etc.;
- Teachers' ICT competencies need to be developed and evaluated systemically;
- Clearer guidelines for tighter integration of ICT-enhanced teaching and learning methods with curriculum objectives;
- The best practice cases in ICT integration need to be disseminated widely among teachers, support for establishing communities of practice among innovative teachers (financial and administrative support, online collaboration environments, etc.);
- Schools need support (and maybe also some push from the MoES) in developing explicit ICT policy and development strategy.

Thus, a number of challenges remained and in 2008 the programme could not have been considered sustainable.

If it is true that the programme in its original format was terminated because of inefficiency or financial constraints, then we can conclude that the government wanted to make the programme more sustainable by eliminating these weaknesses. However, if it is true that the main reason for dismantling the DLF was domestic political rivalry in Georgia or the ignorance of the MoES of the bigger goals of the Deer Leap programme, then we can conclude that sustainability is only possible when those who have the

ownership of the actions also take the responsibility to produce outcome. In the latter case, it would be a clear example of how the Estonian advice about keeping the DLF independent in order to safeguard the programme against political changes was not adopted by the Georgian government, and how that lead to a negative outcome. Unfortunately, due to the limitation of my data, I cannot draw a solid conclusion about why the programme was terminated or what it says about the sustainability of the intervention.

Leaving the issue of the termination of the programme aside, we can look at other factors of sustainability. One of these is the capacity of the recipient country to adopt the changes that come with a development intervention. The civil servant from the Estonian MFA, who was involved in the initial planning phase of the cooperation project, said in the interview that the Georgian government wanted fast solutions that would quickly bring tangible results, and that perhaps their ambitions were too big for their actual capacity. The educational technology expert from Estonia also mentioned that they had to take into consideration the Georgians' ability to cope with change, which sometimes limited the speed of progress. He used the example of the old-school teachers who resisted the new approach for using ICT in education as an example of the difficulties. Yet, both of these interviewees felt that eventually the Georgians did adjust.

In addition, an indicator of sustainability is whether at all and how much the knowledge generated during the intervention will carry on in the long term. Based on my research, it seems that the people that were trained during the cooperation project between Estonia and Georgia still benefit from the knowledge. The clearest examples of this are educators, who still use computers in their classrooms. The teachers I interviewed said that they found the new technologies and methodology useful and helpful. One of them is now involved in teacher training for other teachers and is a strong advocate for using ICT in education. The other is a principal in one of the schools and proudly took me to see elementary school lessons, where personal notebooks were used by all students in literature and geography classes. As I discussed above, the spread of computers and Internet into people's homes also proves that the outcomes of the programme carry on through the students who participated in the Deer Leap programme. Last but not least, most of the staff of the DLF are still working in the educational or IT sectors and continue to utilise the world-view and know-how they

gained during the programme. I did not identify any brain drain from Georgia as a result of this intervention.

Finally, the fact that Estonian experts are still cooperating with the Georgian experts in the field of ICT in education demonstrates that the Deer Leap programme lead to follow-up partnerships and cooperation, which were no longer a part of the development cooperation project, but based on mutual interest to truly cooperate and learn from each other. It also suggests that the Estonian expertise was sincerely valued and the cooperation methods were appreciated by both sides.

## **5.2. Democratisation and development**

While it is clear that both in Estonia and in Georgia, the school computerisation programmes increased access to ICT across the population, the question remains how big was the impact of the Deer Leap development cooperation project on democratisation of Georgia. Some research about building democracy in Georgia suggests that while Europe gave a considerable amount of technical assistance to Georgia in various economic and governance fields after the Rose Revolution, that support remained marginal for democratisation (Khelashvili, 2010, 4). However, my research shows that the Deer Leap programme did have some positive effect on making Georgia more democratic or at least contributed to this possibility.

Based on Carothers' and Youngs' distinctions, democracy is seen in the Estonian development cooperation policy as a fluid process rather than a concrete product, and the assistance takes a non-political developmental approach. Essentially, the Estonian logic has always been that aid should be given to where it can have the most added value, and that this means working with the EaP countries by sharing the Estonian transition experience. Furthermore, there is a conviction that this is the type of cooperation that the developing country partners and other donors need and expect from Estonia. The case of the Deer Leap intervention provides empirical evidence for this claim. The Estonian MFA representative clearly said in the interview that the school computerisation project in Georgia was supported exactly because it was a non-political way to contribute to a social programme that would ultimately lead to economic liberation and thereby to development.

While some of the interviewees expressed concern over the fact that ICT is not used enough in Georgian curricula today, they believe that for the students who were in



school during the high times of Deer Leap, the programme had a great educational value by encouraging activism and connecting them to the world through the Internet. The staff and experts associated with DLF as well as the representative of the Georgian MoES expressed the belief that Deer Leap was essential in demonstrating to the wider public the importance and possibilities of using ICT in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the Estonian popular view, Internet and the idea of transparent and accessible governance are intimately related, and are a key element of democracy and development.

The benefits were particularly significant for remote rural areas. In some areas, the computer labs in the schools also became important community centres and were the only access point to the Internet. What is more, a former DLF staff member said that the impact of the programme was much greater than just on the school system, because the parents of the students and the families of the teachers were also exposed to the new technology. He held that the most notable evidence of the magnitude of the programme is the fact that the demand for ICT services increased during the Deer Leap programme years and this eventually considerably lowered the prices of computers and Internet services in Georgia.

It is common knowledge that countries with better educated people also have stronger economies. Thorvaldur Gylfason and Eduard Hochreiter have compared the post-Soviet Union growth of Estonia and Georgia to determine whether it has been caused by increased efficiency in the use of capital and other resources or brute accumulation of capital. They conclude that

“advances in education at all levels, good governance, and institutional reforms have played a more significant role in raising economic output and efficiency in Estonia than in Georgia which remains marred by various problems related to weak governance in the public and private spheres” (Gylfason and Hochreiter, 2009).

Following this argumentation, we can conclude that technology alone is not sufficient to create immediate socio-economic change and thereby something that we would call development. As we could see in the previous chapter, while the technological advancement through school computerisation did lead to educational improvements, the domestic political changes and the restructuring of the Deal Leap programme after the first phase decelerated the progress. Due to the mentioned governance problems in Georgia, it will probably take more time for it to reach the same level of economic development as Estonia has today.

The fact that Internet penetration in Georgia has increased is evidence of the fact that the population has a higher rate of computer literacy. Various e-services are quickly spreading in Georgia, which indicates that e-governance is taking root in the country. A Georgian IT expert claimed in the interview that in some areas their e-services are even better than Estonian equivalents. Consequently, a long term result of the Deer Leap programme is that today Georgia is itself in the position of sharing their reform experience with other developing countries. The most unique example of this is the implementation of the one-stop shop public service system for citizens, where the first contact point is at a physical service point, but where the different state institutions are connected through advanced electronic databases. The Georgian ICT Business Council, which unites the Georgian ICT companies, offers similar services as eGA in Estonia. The interviewees that are today still working under the Georgian MoES explain that their partner countries are interested in the most recent transition experiences and the Georgians feel that it is their moral obligation to further share the knowledge that has been helpful for them. However, the most recent changes in government have had a somewhat negative influence on such international cooperation, because the new government has been critical of the work of the previous government. Nevertheless, this outcome of the Deer Leap programme illustrates the multidimensional nature of foreign policy, and development cooperation in particular. It is possible that similarly to Estonia in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Georgia will itself soon go through the transformation from being an aid-recipient to becoming a donor. This would also be clear proof that the cooperation between Estonia and Georgia was fruitful.

Moving closer to the EU by modernising the economy and increasing the welfare of the country was the main aim of Georgia when starting the Deer Leap programme. Based on the data I have collected, it is not possible to conclude whether the programme did bring Georgia closer to the EU, but there is also no evidence of the opposite. When I asked the interviewees about the role of Russia in implementing the Deer Leap, neither Estonian nor Georgian respondents agreed with the hypothesis that the project could *per se* be viewed as an anti-Russian tool by the governments. They saw it rather as a soft way to move Georgia closer to the Western values and Russia was not included in that equation. The representative of eGA even said he had never thought that the project could be viewed in this context.

### 5.3. Added value of Estonian assistance

Good cooperation between the two countries and also this programme was stressed at the international level by both countries. The interviewees in Georgia unanimously stated that Estonia was the most suitable partner country for implementing the ICT reform in schools mainly because it had recent practical and positive experience with the same change, but also because the two countries are culturally and geopolitically quite similar. The staff of eGA explained that Georgia wanted and needed to develop and leave behind the status of a *de facto* failed state. eGA sold the idea of Tiger Leap and e-governance to the Georgian political leadership as a tool for quickly changing the image of the country from a failed state to a modern state. While Estonia was not in such a poor state in the 1990s as Georgia, the strong focus on e-governance had helped to eliminate (or at least lessen) the negative label of a “post-Soviet state”.

Georgia was also interested in aligning closer with the European Union. eGA believes that while all three Baltic States were viewed as role models in moving towards the EU, Estonia in particular stood out as a real success story of the Ugly Duckling who became a swan by implementing big and innovative reforms. Estonia was seen as an excellent example of a successful transformation, particularly in the ICT sector. The Georgian interviewees, particularly those that actively participated in the planning phases of the programme, stressed that it was reassuring to know that the Estonians, unlike other significantly wealthier Western donors, had personal experience in implementing a similar reform in a transition-country and could share their real life lessons-learnt. One Georgian interviewee even believed that computerising the schools would not have happened in such a systematic way if there the study visit to Estonia did not take place, and give the Georgians the opportunity to learn about it in the first place. While some American experts were also involved in the programme, the key advice was still received from Estonia, because their expertise was considered to be highly modern at the time by both Georgians and the other foreign experts. The Estonian approach to using ICT in education was unique as it not only provided schools with computer labs, but also integrated the new technology into the curriculum.

Both representatives of eGA and the Estonian educational experts expressed the opinion that besides the fact that the other donors did not have personal experiences with transition, they also did not comprehend the situation of the country very well. In turbulent transition times, the changes must be fast and the working conditions are

unstable and unpredictable. Making reforms in peaceful and developed societies is never this complicated and it is difficult to understand this without experience. Estonians were familiar with what going through rapid changes feels like from the “inside”. Furthermore, the big international donors were much slower and required more bureaucracy in programming and funding procedures, which was not suitable for the rapidly evolving situation in Georgia and could not compete with simplicity of the Estonian offer for starting a reform. The personal skills of diplomacy, storytelling and marketing of Ivar Tallo from eGA undoubtedly also played a role in reaching an agreement for cooperation with the Georgian government. He used his personal experience of living abroad and later witnessing the Estonian reforms take place to convince the Georgians that it is feasible for them to follow suit. One staff member of eGA said that the programme would not have been possible without Tallo’s involvement.

A small yet significant unique aspect of Estonian development cooperation was the ability to work in Russian. Experts and trainers from Western European states or the United States often communicate in English and are unable to access as many the final beneficiaries. My personal experience of working with Georgians also confirms that this can be the determining factor whether the cooperation is fruitful or not. More and more Georgians (mostly in Tbilisi or the younger generation) also speak English, but many countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia work mostly in Russian and speaking the language is comparative advantage for those Estonians who can communicate in it.

Regardless of all the complications and the termination of the DLF, the Estonian experts who have worked on the topic of ICT in education in several countries think that the Georgian cooperation project is the most successful of them. They said that the main reason for this was the timing of the programme. On the one hand, Georgia had just gone through a revolution and was actively reaching for ways to modernise the country. They were open to cooperation with foreign partners and wanted to do reforms quickly. On the other hand, Estonia has just become the member of EU and was looking for ways to establish its position in the development cooperation scene. The fact that Estonia has just turned from an aid recipient country to a donor of development assistance was by itself its uniqueness compared to the more experienced Western donors. The interviewees concluded that capturing the right political momentum contributed to the success of this programme.

## **VI Conclusion**

The aim of my research was to shed light on why and how Estonia aspires to offer added value with its development cooperation through sharing its positive transition experiences and to what extent added value is actually realised. I explored the topic by defining what is meant by transition experience, and by mapping the Estonian logic for implementing such activities through its development cooperation. The thesis scrutinised Estonian development assistance to Georgia based on the example of the Deer Leap programme for computerising schools. Support to schools was a priority for Estonian assistance to Georgia since the very beginning of the development cooperation between the two countries.

Estonia became a donor of development assistance in 1998 as it was in the process of joining the EU, which requires all members to contribute to this policy. From the early days of being a donor, the Estonian approach was to share its transition experience with other countries that shared a similar past with the country. The main focus of the Estonian assistance was on supporting democracy and good governance; and the priority partners for bilateral cooperation were mostly in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. Georgia was one of the most favoured partners. The reforms experience of Estonia was heavily related to an e-transition and adopting a number of services and programs to create socio-economic growth by using ICT. One of the great successes was considered to be the Tiger Leap programme that started in 1997 and resulted in computerising all schools as well as encouraging the teachers to use the new technology for teaching.

Georgia is a developing country that has recently been through several wars as well as major political shifts. Significant change in the country's leadership took place with Rose Revolution at the end of 2003, when the reform-oriented Mikheil Saakashvili stepped into the office. As a Western-educated man he wanted to move the country closer to Europe and to improve the economic situation of the country and its people. In search of idea for quick and effective reforms, the new government also looked towards Estonia, which along with the other Baltic States was seen as a success story, because it had successfully moved towards the EU. Estonia was also interested in supporting the post-revolution Georgia and introduced its e-story to the Georgians. The Tiger Leap

programme was something that quickly impressed the Georgian officials and a copy-cat programme titled Deer Leap was created and funded by the Georgian government.

In this thesis, I expected to find answers to three questions. Firstly, I wanted to know what sharing transition experience means in the Estonian development cooperation. The research showed that Estonian development policy is mainly focused on the added value of Estonian aid, sharing transition experience and thereby building democracy. Democracy is understood as a fluid process rather than a concrete product, and the assistance takes a non-political developmental approach. There is a conviction that this is the type of cooperation that the developing country partners and other donors need and expect from Estonia. The priority partners for the Estonian government are the EU Eastern Partnership countries and most of the activities are implemented in the form of training partner country officials on “practical” matters regarding democratic institutions and different areas of socioeconomic reform. This is assumed to be a way to build up the country’s image of a reform-related knowledge-provider in the former Soviet space. The transition experience is perceived by as something in which Estonia has a unique competency and can offer added value in.

Secondly, I was interested in the effectiveness or impact of the Estonian development interventions by means of sharing its transition experience. I defined three indicators – relevance, ownership and sustainability – that I consider to illuminate useful information about the impact of Estonian assistance. First, my research concluded that the intervention was relevant to the needs of the partner country’s national development strategy, generally responded to the expectations of Georgian society, and was properly coordinated with other donors. However, the shortcoming was that the final beneficiaries were not included in the planning phase in order to find out what their expectations and need were. Next, I concluded that the aid-recipient side in Georgia has full ownership of the programme both in terms of content, and financing. Even though the text of the computerisation programme was written by Estonian experts, the content was thoroughly discussed with Georgian stakeholders and the management of the DLF was in the hands of Georgians. The programme was managed cost-effectively as the Georgian government together with private donors covered the most of the costs and the work of the Estonian experts was covered by themselves. Finally, the sustainability of the cooperation was the most difficult to assess, because while the expected outcomes of the first phase of the programme were achieved, then

the programme was discontinued in 2009. My data was not sufficient to conclude whether Deer Leap was terminated because of domestic political rivalries, the financial crises or the need to implement a general educational restructuring in Georgia, but it is likely that all these factors played a role. However, I argued that long-term impact was achieved though the fact that some of the activities of the programme are continued through different means. Furthermore, the knowledge created during the project lives on through the programme staff and participants.

My analysis showed that the general opinion of the Deer Leap participants is that the programme was successful while it lasted. The interviews confirm that even though the programme did not survive the political changes in the country, it is still remembered with kind words by the administrative staff as well as teachers, school principals and students. The general evaluation of the participants are well summarised by one of the team members, which said that “the biggest failure of the programme was that it was terminated.”

Last but not least, my third research questions set out to discover the unique added value that Estonia offers to its partner countries by sharing its transition experience. The conclusion is that the “transition experience” itself is the unique attribute of Estonia’s contribution. The Georgian partners chose Estonia as a partner because they had personal and recent experience with implementing the same reforms. This meant that they could understand the political, social and technical difficulties Georgia was facing better than older and richer donors, who were “book smart” and often also inflexible. Also, Estonia was seen as role model in moving towards the EU, which was one of the aims of the Georgian government. Other positive aspects of Estonian assistance included the fact that thanks to close cultural links, the cooperation worked quite smoothly. Knowledge of the Russian language was also a plus compared to many other donors.

The data I have collected for this thesis is not sufficient to fully explain the causality of the Deer Leap programme and the changes in the level of democracy in Georgia, but it is possible to conclude that there was some positive effect. While there are concerns over the fact that ICT is not used enough in Georgian curricula today, my research indicates that the students who were in school during the high times of Deer Leap as well as their teachers and families have gained access to new technology and the information that is available through the ICT channels. What is more, new e-

governance services have been introduced in Georgia, which improve access to and transparency of governmental services. The benefits are particularly visible in the remote rural areas. This means having a more democratic society both according to the Estonian development cooperation logic and to the Georgian government's interpretation of democracy.

To sum it up, it seems to be true that Estonia has unique added value to offer due to its history of implementing reforms during the past 20 odd years, and that based on the example of the Deer Leap programme the impacts are quite positive in terms of building democracy in partner countries. Yet, further research on other projects and partner countries is needed to determine whether the ICT education reform is a single positive example or whether the same can be argued about Estonian aid in general.



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